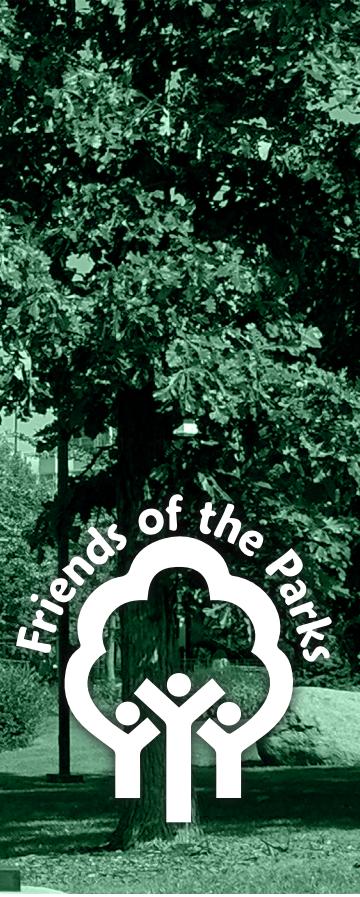




# STATE OF THE PARKS 2018



## **CREDITS:**

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# A NOTE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

Friends of the Parks' 2018 State of the Parks Report is grounded in the historic pursuit of democracy and equity in and for Chicago's parks. It responds to concerns that Chicagoans have brought to us over the last three years as we have done our day-to-day business of supporting park advisory councils, park stewards, and other park partners. Additionally, we conducted a "Listening Tour" and stakeholder surveys to inform our existing programs and our board-led strategic planning process, which culminated in 2018. Among many concerns, we repeatedly heard from stakeholders on the south and west sides that it is time for a new legal initiative against the Chicago Park District because of racial inequities. These concerns were undergirded by a Summer 2014 investigative report in The Chicago Reporter: "Inequity in park access lingers."<sup>1</sup>

Thirty-five years ago, after years of investigation by both citizen groups and the federal government, a Consent Decree was established as a result of a 1982 United States Department of Justice legal initiative against the Chicago Park District for discrimination against minority communities. The court order created a rigorous framework for a responsive, transparent, and equitable park district. It was in effect for six years, and Friends of the Parks registered our displeasure when the court lifted the order even though the Chicago Park District was not in full compliance with the terms of the Consent Decree.

Twenty years ago, recognizing how much progress was still left ahead, Friends of the Parks collaborated with dozens of stakeholders on a State of the Parks report. This in-depth investigation on many park-related topics, from community participation to programming, graded the district based on both publicly accessible information and the experiences of hundreds of park users from across the city. We are glad to add this project to this great tradition and to honor the contributions of past activists.

In many ways we are proud to recognize the impressive achievements and incredible mission of the Chicago Park District. To maintain over 8800 acres of parkland across nearly 600 parks while facilitating over 26,000 activities is an extraordinary work. The park district continues to add new acres and programs annually, helping Chicagoans to engage with natural spaces, recreational opportunities, and each other.

Yet our research has revealed challenges to democracy, transparency, and equity in the system, and it suggests some rather obvious disconnects between the Chicago Park District's investments and the needs of underserved communities. Parkland, amenities, and programs continue to be unequally distributed across the city. The approval rate of capital requests suggests significant class and race inequities. Chicagoans lack much of the power for meaningful democratic participation that is available to residents of many other cities across Illinois and the country. Throughout this report we have endeavored to provide a fair perspective on the district's work while laying bare some hard and difficult truths.

In June 2018, we previewed at our “Parks as Democracy?” Conference the key themes that were emerging from our research and solicited feedback from participants. That led us to spend much of the summer on further investigation, including submitting numerous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Chicago Park District to garner further insights. While we were at work, Chicago struggled through another difficult season of violence. The data we received through those FOIA requests speak quite clearly to part of the problem: the Chicago Park District is providing quality park programming the least in the marginalized communities whose youth need it the most.

As Friends of the Parks implements its revised mission statement, adopted in 2018 — **to inspire, equip, and mobilize a diverse Chicago to ensure an equitable park system for a healthy Chicago** — this report will serve as a basis for educating and organizing neighbors across the city who want to pursue the health and success of both their local parks and the district as a whole. It may answer questions they currently hold and serve as a catalyst for their own curiosity and activism. They may find, as we have, that there are some problems that are clearly related to racial inequities. Meanwhile, there also exist systemic issues that cut across the entire park district and affect parks and Chicagoans city-wide regardless of demographics. As we keep digging deeper into these issues and seek to elevate a city-wide conversation about a new path forward, in the months ahead we will convene a broad cross-section of stakeholders to more fully flesh out and add to the high-level recommendations we have included herein.

Also, with a municipal election season upon us, we will partner with “parktivists” and other activists alike to ensure that these themes and concerns immediately are inserted into the public dialogue. Our new mayor and new city council should be expected to be informed about and to respond with their visions for healthy parks for a healthy Chicago.

We look forward to working with all who care for the city’s parks toward a well-balanced park system, protected by Chicagoans for Chicagoans, advancing the individual, community, public, ecological, and economic health and well-being of our city.

Special thanks for this report go to the primary investigator and author, Friends of the Parks Policy and Program Associate Daniel La Spata. We also want to recognize previous Program and Policy Associate Julia Epplin-Zapf, who contributed significantly to the Listening Tours, stakeholder surveys, and early versions of this report. Finally, we recognize the leadership of former Board Policy Committee Chair Rev. Sylvia Y. Jones, whose leadership of the committee and as a long-time park advisory council leader have brought important perspectives to bear. Many other staff, volunteers, members and friends have also contributed to this report. We are grateful.

Sincerely,

Juanita Irizarry  
Executive Director

Lauren Moltz  
Board Chair

Fred Bates  
Policy Committee Chair



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The time is right for a city-wide conversation about Chicago's parks. With major challenges to existing parks in terms of disinvestment or real estate development juxtaposed against significant opportunities for new parkland, many evoke the spirit of Daniel Burnham's "Plan of Chicago," commonly referred to as the Burnham Plan. "Make No Little Plans" they say.

These conversations are happening in the midst of the 35th anniversary of the Consent Decree, a court order which was put in place to try to ensure the Chicago Park District would treat parks across the city equitably. But we seem to be losing ground that may have been made up during the life of the now long-expired Consent Decree.

Meanwhile, in reference to present-day opportunities to redevelop mega-parcels like the North Branch Industrial Corridor, Mayor Rahm Emanuel said in October 2017: "A new century for Chicago requires a new plan for Chicago's parks, one that draws upon the inspiration of Daniel Burnham to use our river and lake to better connect communities and enhance residents' quality of life."

We, too, believe that Chicago is facing a Daniel Burnham-type moment. But in order to promote healthy parks for a healthy Chicago, we need to know the facts upon which we are building our foundation and take the time for healthy civic debates and proper planning.

To more fully participate in dialogues about our park priorities, Chicagoans need more information at their fingertips. To that end, this 2018 State of the Parks report provides context and history about Chicago's parks and the Chicago Park District. We need to know how much parkland we have, that it's not enough, and that its quality varies greatly across the city. We need to know that the Park District's history includes rough patches in terms of systemic discrimination against minority communities, patterns which we see again in present day as detailed herein. The history also includes hindrances to transparency and public participation—realities we also observe in current Chicago Park District operations and played out at parks all across the city.

The narrative lays out the story in a way that most significant indicators of inequity are revealed near the end of the report. Therefore, we offer the below summary in the form of a "Top Ten" list, with highlights from each chapter.

**#10: CHICAGO NEEDS MORE PARKLAND:** Despite our rich Burnham Plan history which gave us a wonderful system of parks, The Trust for Public Lands' 2017 report ranks Chicago as 14<sup>th</sup> of 18 cities in park acreage per 1000 residents.<sup>2</sup>

While over 92% of Chicagoans live within a 10 minute walk of a park, the city lags behind most other high-density cities in park acreage per capita and total city acreage committed to parkland.

We also see inequitable access across the city to many of the recreational amenities and facilities Chicagoans hope to find in their parks. And current major proposals to significantly add green space, along the Chicago River for example, offer it in the form of potentially problematic privately-owned public spaces rather than Chicago Park District controlled land.

**#9: SOUTH SIDE PARKS OF SIMILAR SIZE AND CLASS TO THOSE ON THE NORTH SIDE HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY SMALLER BUDGETS.<sup>3</sup>**

**#8: 50% OF THE MONEY THAT THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT BUDGETS TO SUBSIDIZE THE PARTICIPATION OF NEEDY YOUTH DOESN'T GET USED.**<sup>4</sup> Additionally, paths for community participation in the budget process are limited and are being curtailed even further. Public meetings required by the Park District's own code go unscheduled and the Implementation Committee, a form of public oversight over the Capital Improvement Plan, was suddenly eliminated in recent months when we asked about it after being ignored for decades

**#7. THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS LACKS INDEPENDENCE.** Despite the fact that the park district is its own government authority, it is beholden to the mayor.<sup>5</sup>

While seven of Illinois' 10 largest cities have independent park districts, Chicago is the only one without an elected park board. Across the country, many park departments are housed within the municipal government body. There are various models to consider to move the Park District Board toward independence.

**#6. PARK ADVISORY COUNCILS ARE INCREASINGLY SUBJECTED TO UNILATERAL CONTROL BY THE PARK DISTRICT.**<sup>6</sup> This is despite them being created to be independent advisory bodies. And as power has become more consolidated in the hands of the Board of Commissioners, it has become increasingly difficult for park stakeholders to apply meaningful influence over their parks or the district as a whole.

**#5. MULTIPLE ISSUES AROUND CRIME TOO OFTEN LEAD TO PARKS THAT DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY.** Despite official data showing relatively low levels of reported crime on park property,<sup>7</sup> highly publicized violent crimes in or near parks plus stakeholders' reports of gang member presence, unreported crimes, and a general sense of insecurity compound these issues.

The Chicago Park District's security strategy is unclear and tends to dismiss the value of community-building in the most challenging neighborhoods.

Additionally, security officials may lack the mandate and training to resolve potential criminal activities happening in their parks. Importantly, many of our parks in neighborhoods challenged with the most violent crimes may lack the programming necessary to engage the community's youth productively.

**#4. PROGRAMMING FOR PARKS ON THE CITY'S NORTH SIDE IS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE ROBUST THAN PROGRAMMING FOR PARKS ON THE SOUTH SIDE.**<sup>8</sup> An examination of park areas with the most programs (area North4 with 2,974 separate activities) and the least (South2 with 757) showed that their primary differences were in their percentage of black population and poverty rates. It presents an alarming indication that further racial inequities may be infecting the district.

Where processes existed under the Consent Decree to ensure equitably distributed and responsive programming, many parks now lack the programs that are relevant and affordable.

**#3. HIGHER INCOME COMMUNITIES WERE ALMOST TWICE AS LIKELY TO HAVE THEIR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT REQUESTS APPROVED THAN LOWER INCOME COMMUNITIES.**

**#2. CAPITAL REQUESTS IN BLACK COMMUNITIES ARE APPROVED AT HALF THE RATE OF THOSE IN WHITE COMMUNITIES.**<sup>9, 10</sup>

**#1. LATINO COMMUNITIES HAVE ONLY ABOUT 197 ACRES OF THE PARKLAND, BY FAR THE LEAST OF ANY RACIAL GROUP IN THE CITY.**<sup>11</sup>

Worse, these parks only had eleven capital requests approved. Thus, Latino communities, who already have the least parkland, also are receiving the least capital investment from the District.

While it has added hundreds of acres, the District's own capital spending in general obligation bonds is barely more than it was in 1983 (adjusted for inflation). Examining capital requests submitted by the public, elected officials, and the District we found that just 33 of the district's nearly 600 parks accounted for 50% of the approved capital improvement projects.

The challenges and opportunities facing our city's parks are great. As we remember the 35th anniversary of the Park District Consent Decree, which radically altered standards for democracy and equity across the district, we see best practices that inspire our own vision for what the District could be. We hope this document mobilizes all park stakeholders and the Chicago Park District into conversation over the challenges we are facing and the changes we want to see.



# CHAPTER I: ACREAGE & AMENITIES





# INTRODUCTION

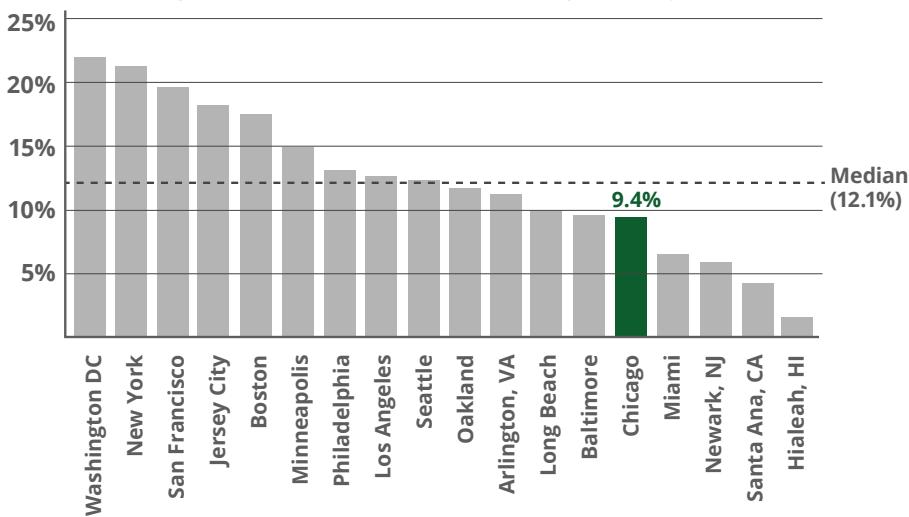
At the time of its incorporation in 1837, Chicago adopted the motto of Urbs in Horto, or city in a garden. However, this motto preceded most of the great parks, large and small, that we have come to enjoy. Most of the small parks that existed then had been donated or sold to the city by real estate developers, who knew even then the positive impact green space had on property values. With the donation of the land that would become Lincoln Park in 1860 and the creation of the South, West, and Lincoln Park Commissions in 1869, the development of Chicago's network of parks began in earnest.<sup>12</sup> The city's commitment to expanding public parks was further enshrined in Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett's 1909 Plan of Chicago, which committed to a public land along the entire lakefront, as well as the expansion of parks and nature preserves across the area.<sup>13</sup> This section will examine the remarkable diversity of these parks, including the distribution of particular amenities, and prescribe policies to expand our public green spaces as equitably as possible.

# TOTAL ACREAGE

The Chicago Park District owns over 8,816 acres of green space across over 598 parks.<sup>14</sup> When combined with the land of the Cook County Forest Preserve and other agencies, that number swells to just under 13,000 acres, creating immense opportunities for both relaxation and recreation across the city. In fact, 92% of Chicagoans live within a 10 minute walk of a city park (note: this standard, commonly used by the Trust for Public Land and the Chicago Park District, will be used throughout this report), placing Chicago in the top 10 among U.S. cities for park access. However, when examining other park access measures among high-density cities - as determined by the Trust for Public Land<sup>15</sup> - Chicago falls behind other comparable cities.

When looking at comparable high density cities, Chicago ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of 18, with only 9.4% of the city's acreage dedicated as parkland. Comparable cities such as New York (21.2%), Los Angeles (12.7%) or Minneapolis (14.9%) far outstrip Chicago.

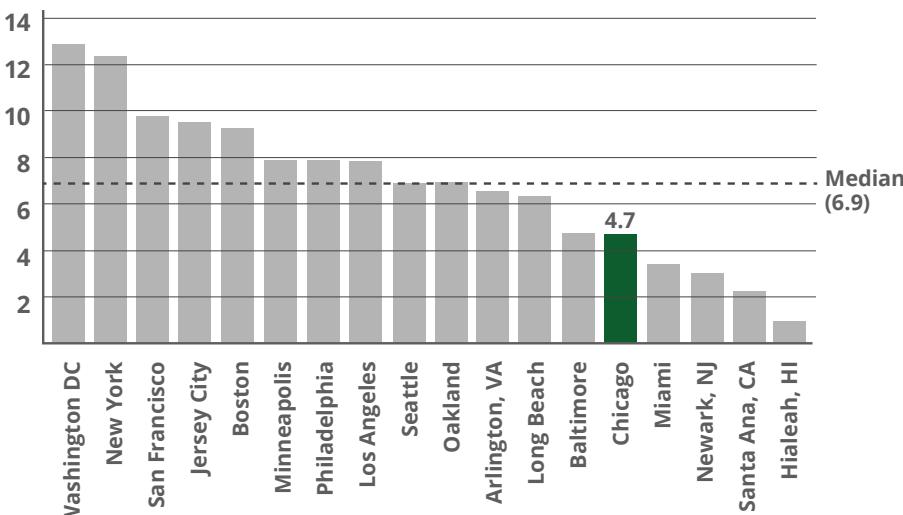
**Figure 1: Parkland as a Percentage of City Area**



Source: Trust for Public Land, 2017 City Park Facts

Chicago also lags behind in park acres per 1,000 residents. With only 4.7 acres for every 1,000 residents, it ranks only 14th out of 18. To reach even the median park acres as either percent of total acreage or per thousand residents, Chicago would have to add 3,635 or 5,713 acres respectively. As 3,635 acres would represent three new Lincoln Parks (!), this represents an exceptionally challenging goal, but it does point to the need for the city to explore every opportunity to add significant new park acreage.

**Figure 2: Park Acres Per Thousand Residents**



Source: Trust for Public Land, 2017 City Park Facts

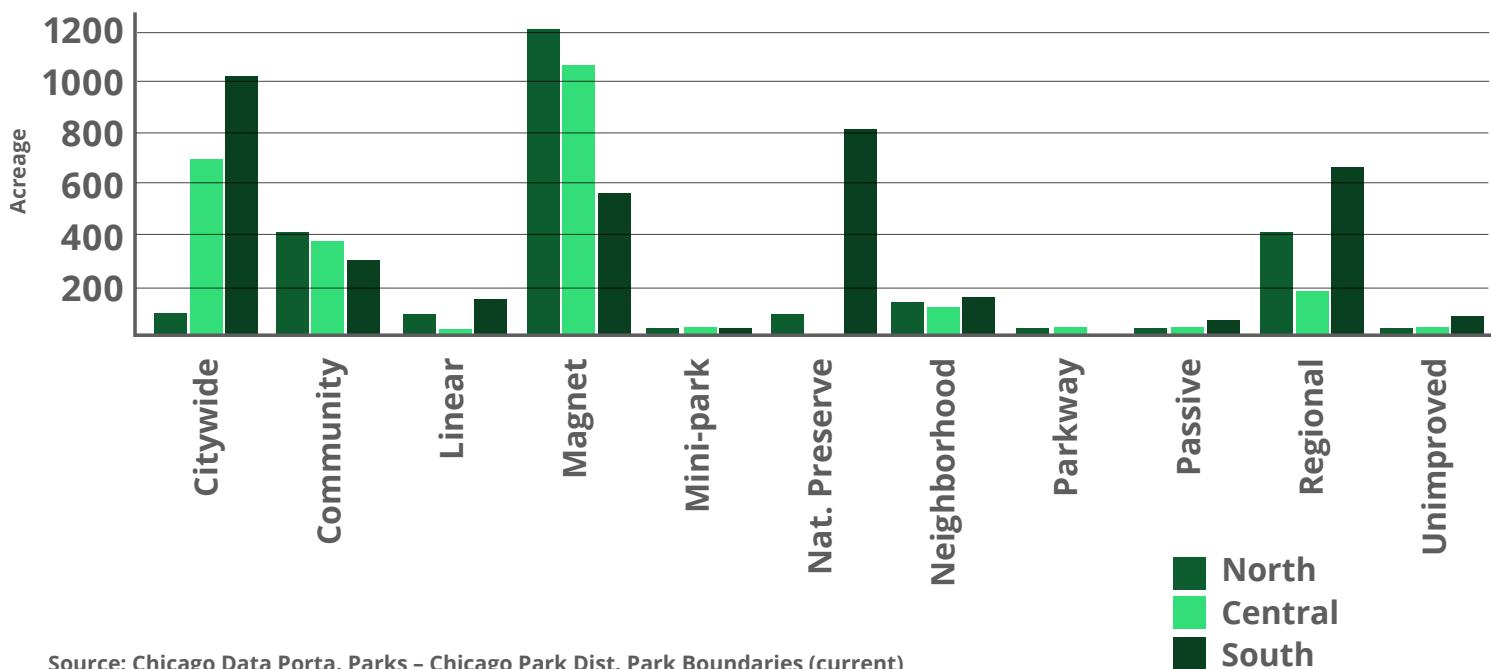
# CLASSIFYING THE PARKS

Chicago's parks come in a variety of shapes and sizes with a wide array of facilities and amenities, delineated by the Chicago Park District in 10 classes.<sup>16</sup>

Parks of each class are spread across the city of Chicago and distributed across the park district's three regions.

While the North Region has 2,475 acres of parkland, over half of it is in the region's one Magnet park, Lincoln Park. The Central Region has almost the same number of acres at 2510 and more than four times as many acres of Citywide parks as the North region. The South region has the most acreage by far at 3833, but also the most nature preserve, passive, and unimproved parkland, leaving residents with fewer spaces for structured recreation. It also has the fewest total parks (186 versus 213 in the North region and 198 in the Central region). Though the South region has also received six new parks in the past year (Parks 582-587), there is no information in the Chicago Park District budget documents, nor in the Chicago Data Portal, that includes the location or condition of these parks.

**Figure 3: Park Acreage by Class and Region**



Source: Chicago Data Porta. Parks - Chicago Park Dist. Park Boundaries (current)

## NORTH BRANCH PRESERVE PARK

The creation of sizable new parks is a substantial challenge, though not an insurmountable one. The 24-acre North Branch Preserve Park is a new public park envisioned along the Chicago River between Cortland and North Ave. Driven by concerned and committed communities, made possible through the modernization of the North Branch Industrial Corridor, this park is a Burnham-inspired opportunity and can set a precedent for public access along the river.

**CITYWIDE PARK:** a large park of at least 50 acres that contains a combination of indoor and outdoor facilities serving visitors from the entire city but predominantly the neighborhood around the park. They have a Class A or Class B<sup>17</sup> fieldhouse (a fieldhouse is a park's recreation facility, with classes discussed further in Chapter VII) and at least one magnet facility, such as a museum, cultural center, conservatory, marina, major lakefront beach, stadium, sports center, or golf course, and a variety of passive and active recreational areas (ex.: Marquette Park, Humboldt Park, Rainbow Beach).

**COMMUNITY PARK:** Generally from 5 to 25 acres with a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. This class includes parks with more than 15 acres that have a Class C or Class D fieldhouse as well as those with less than five acres that do have a Class A fieldhouse, Class B fieldhouse, or a magnet facility (ex.: Oz Park, Union Park, Fernwood Park).

**MAGNET PARK:** These large parks are in excess of 50 acres and contain a combination of indoor and outdoor facilities. They attract a large number of visitors from the city, the metropolitan area, and beyond (ex.: Jackson Park; Lincoln Park; Northerly Island).

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARK:** These are generally parks with  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre to 5 acres with a playground. They may contain other indoor or outdoor recreational facilities, although indoor facilities shall not exceed the size of a Class C or Class D fieldhouse. Exceptions may be parks with more acreage but that have no indoor facilities (ex.: Winnemac Park; Veterans Memorial; Lowe Park).

**LINEAR PARK:** narrow parks, such as a riverwalk or multi-use trail; either former right of way or parallel with railroad right of ways (ex.: Fernwood Parkway; Major Taylor Bike Trail; The 606 / Bloomingdale Trail).

**MINIPARK / PARKWAY:** Those that are less than a  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre in size with a playground. They may or may not contain other indoor or outdoor recreational facilities, with indoor facilities not exceeding the size of a Class D fieldhouse (ex.: Eugenie Triangle; Pendleton Park; Zatterberg Park).

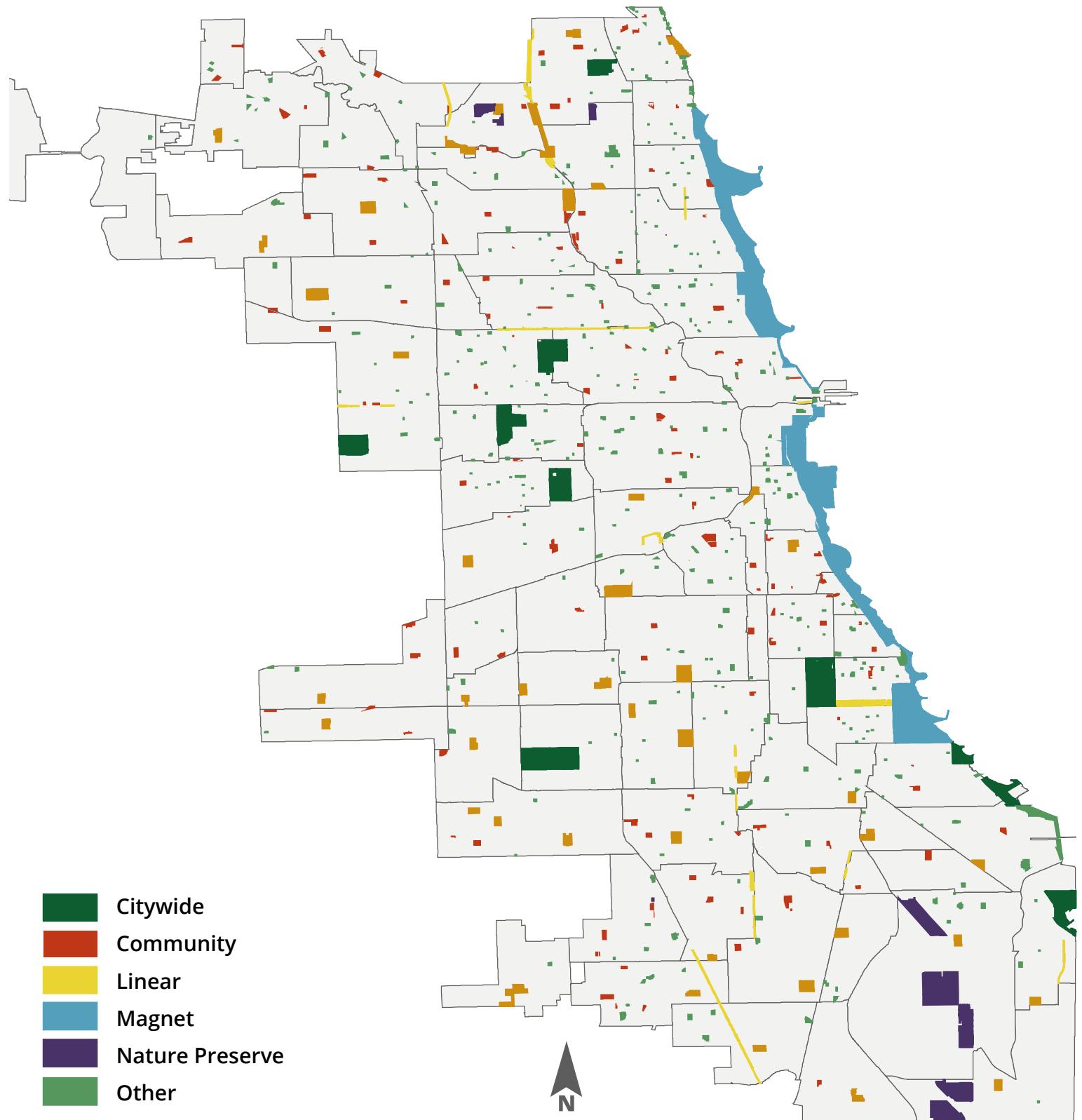
**NATURE PRESERVE PARK:** Land designated for the establishment and preservation of natural areas. May have facilities for nature education (ex.: North Park Nature Center, Hegewisch Marsh).

**PASSIVE PARK:** a landscaped park which may have parking, benches, paths, or water fountains, but does not include indoor/outdoor facilities or designated playing fields for active recreation (ex.: Washington Square Park, Steelworkers Park, North Shore Beach).

**REGIONAL PARK:** Ranges from 15 to 75 acres and has a Class A or Class B fieldhouse. It contains a variety of passive and active outdoor recreational areas. (ex.: Bessemer Park, Welles Park, Gage Park)

**UNIMPROVED PARK:** Land acquired for future park development (ex.: DuSable Park, most numbered but unnamed parks).

**Figure 4: Distribution of Chicago's Parks by Park Class**



# MEASURING PARK AMENITIES

As previously noted, there are a wide variety of amenities available in Chicago's parks, from swimming pools to sports fields to fitness centers and beyond. However, walkable access to these amenities varies depending on your community, as illustrated below.<sup>18</sup>

## SWIMMING POOLS

While many residents live within a half mile of an indoor or outdoor swimming pool, we see notable exclusions which may point to racial inequities. Chicago's lakefront communities have little pool access but are also within a ten-minute walk of numerous beaches. Latino-majority communities like Hermosa and South Lawndale and African-American neighborhoods like West Lawn and Gage Park are miles from the lake but also have minimal access to public pools.

## FITNESS CENTERS

The park district's fitness centers are slightly more disperse across the city, but Latino enclaves such as Brighton Park and Belmont Cragin and many African-American communities like Chicago Lawn and Chatham still have no facilities. In communities which may lack access to affordable gyms and fitness centers, the presence of park district facilities is even more necessary.

Figure 5: Swimming Pool Access

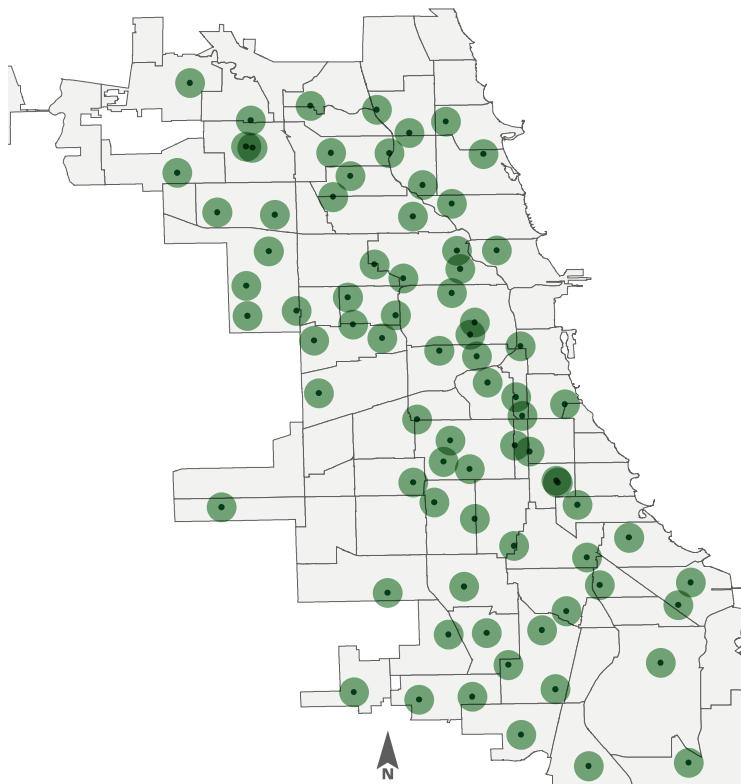
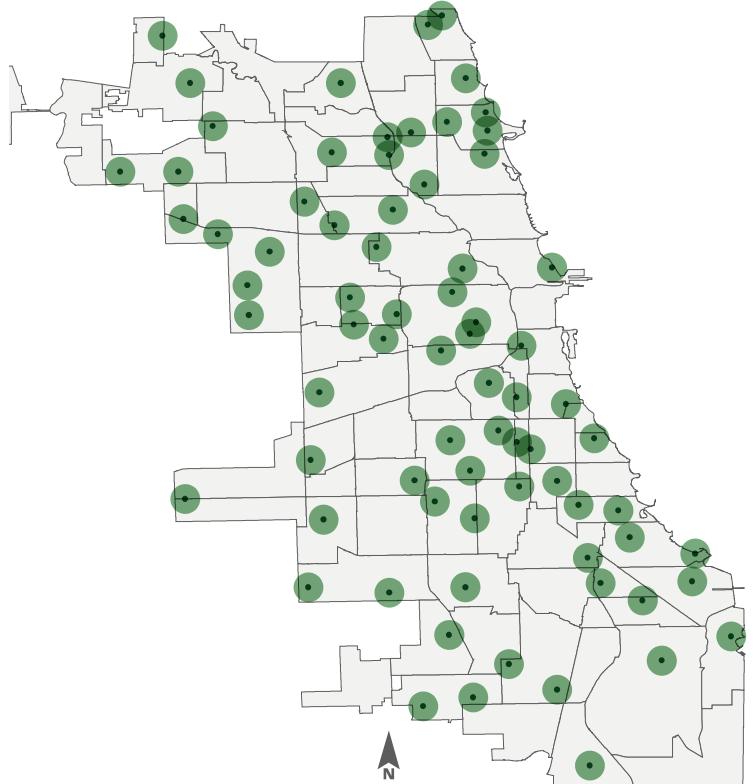
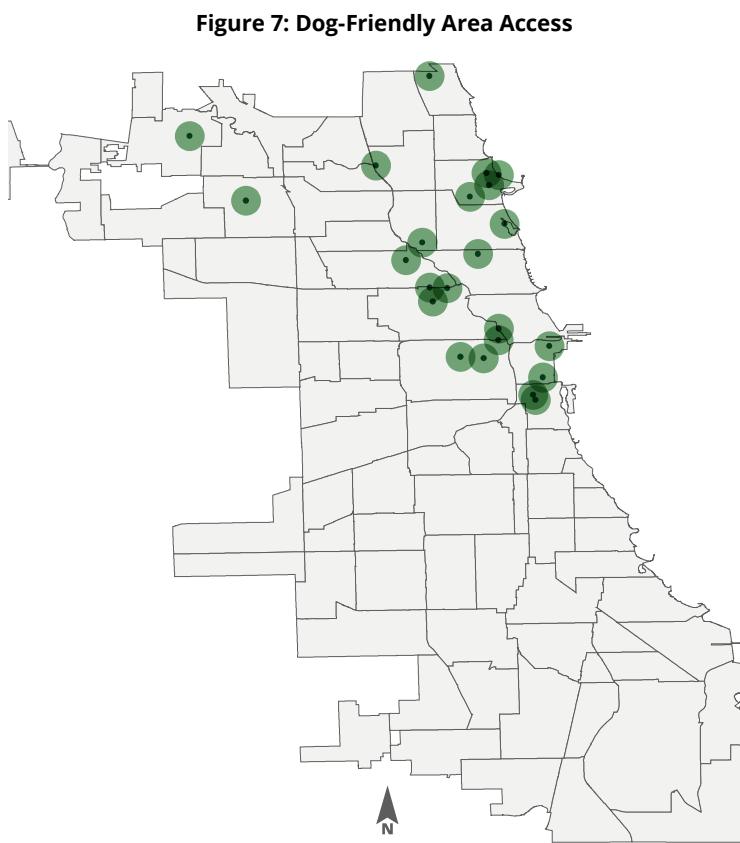


Figure 6: Fitness Center Access



## DOG PARKS

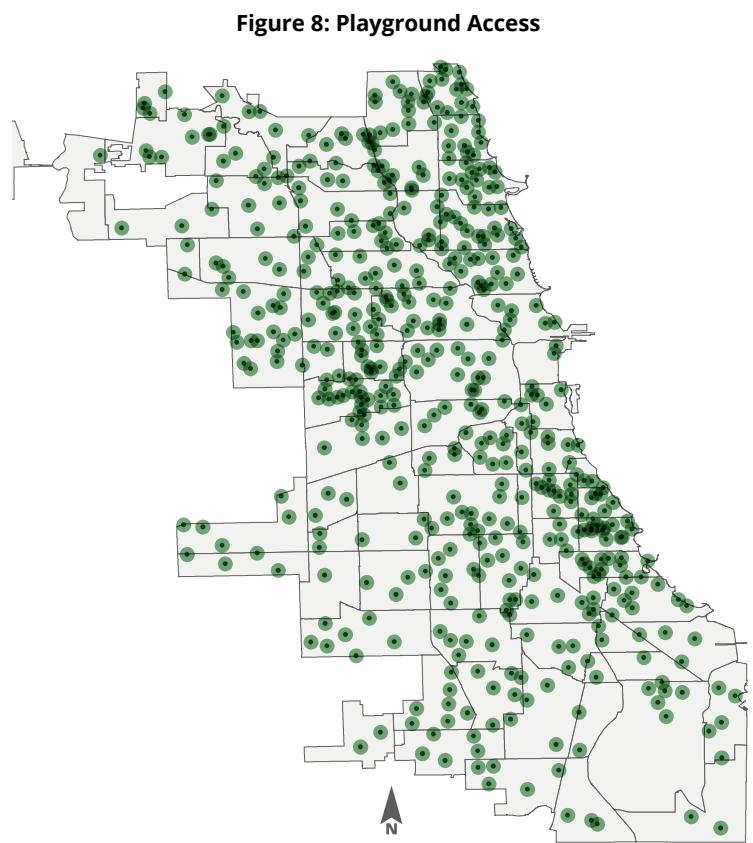
Dog-friendly areas are commonly associated with upper-income north side communities and not without reason; it is impossible to find an official dog park on the South or West sides of the city. One of the few unofficial dog parks south of the loop, Jackson Bark, is currently under threat from plans for a new golf course<sup>19</sup>, creating renewed urgency to ensure park equity for Chicago's four legged residents and those who care for them. Notable progress is the consideration of five new dog parks on the South Side, and the recent groundbreaking of a new dog friendly area in Calumet Park.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 7: Dog-Friendly Area Access**

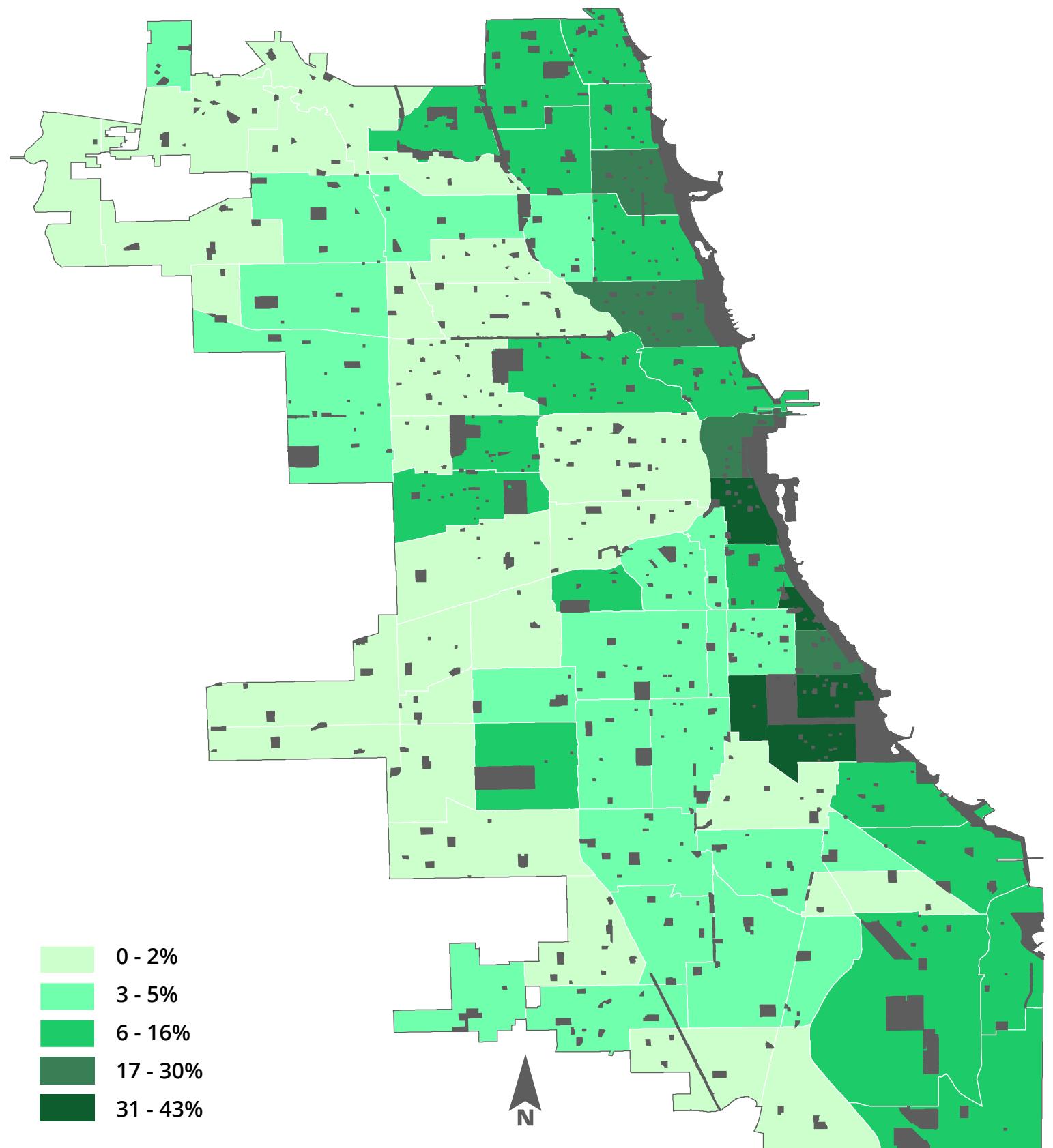
## PLAYGROUNDS

When examining playground access, we have reduced our radius to a quarter-mile from. Adults may be willing & able to walk a half-mile in ten minutes, but our kids often lack the strength and patience. With this consideration, it can be argued that Chicago provides more universal access to playgrounds than many of its other amenities, but as one moves further west and south, the number of playgrounds decreases. In fact, looking across these facilities-access maps show remarkable similarities and indicate spaces where capital improvements may be necessary to address racial inequities.



**Figure 8: Playground Access**

**Figure 9: Parkland as Percentage of Community Area Acreage**



# CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Chicago has developed a remarkable and robust park system over more than 150 years, with 92% of residents living within a ten minute walk of a park. But as we have found, that system continues to be marked by geographic inequities, which may relate to racial and socioeconomic inequities. As Figure 9 shows, the majority of Chicago's community areas have less than 4.5% of their land devoted to park space. When a resident does manage to walk to their closest park, they may be frustrated by what they find - a patch of grass less than a half-acre in size lacking facilities that would make the trip worthwhile. Analysis of the District shows that the best served communities, in terms of park acreage and amenities, continue to be along the lakefront and toward the center and north sides of the city. These inequities are widespread but not without repair. To that end, we offer the following recommendations.

**1. INCREASE PARK ACREAGE IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.** The park district should make every effort to purchase and develop new parkland, focusing on segregated high-poverty community areas with less than 4.5% of their total land devoted to parks. Both the current Building on Burnham plan and the emerging redevelopment of the city's industrial corridors represents excellent opportunities, particularly along the Chicago River. Friends of the Parks' Last Four Miles campaign to extend the Lakefront Path to the boundaries of Chicago, also represents an excellent opportunity for the park district to pursue.

**2. PLACE EMPHASIS ON PARK DISTRICT OWNED AND MANAGED LAND IN UPCOMING PLANNING EFFORTS.** Often, new developments are allowed to use developer-owned "publicly accessible" green spaces to satisfy open space requirements. When private corporations dictate the development, management, and public access to green spaces, it seldom leads to park spaces desired by Chicago. The Chicago Park District should instead focus on acquiring this land through either purchase or donation, making a particular effort to create new Neighborhood and Community parks.

**3. ADDRESS FACILITIES' INEQUITIES IN FUTURE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS.** Utilize future capital bonds to improve access to basic amenities and facilities in underserved communities, particularly as it relates to child and family fitness and recreation. (This recommendation will be further addressed in the Budget Analysis section of this report)



# CHAPTER 2:

# BUDGET





# INTRODUCTION

Maintaining over 8,800 acres of parkland across almost 600 parks while providing programming that meets the needs of Chicago's residents and visitors is no small endeavor. The Chicago Park District has managed to increase its budget to \$462.3 million (FY2018) over the past decade and expanded its offerings, while keeping its property tax levy relatively flat, instead predominantly relying on privatized contracts and events for new revenue. This section will discuss the CPD budget process, its revenue sources and expenditures, and utilize original and outside analysis to determine how effectively this budget supports the interests of democracy, transparency, and equity.

## PROCESS<sup>21</sup>

The Chicago Park District's 2018 budget timeline is outlined below, with the 2019 budget currently proposed for approval by the board. Its fiscal year runs from Jan. 1st to Dec. 31st, with the budget process taking place over the previous six months. While the process is detailed and deliberate, it is questionable whether there is adequate space for resident input or sufficient power and influence ascribed to their input. Many park activists are unaware that the online forums existed or how they would have accessed them. The first public forum, held at Fosco Park, raises questions around accessibility for the public, particularly where transportation, childcare, and translation are concerned. Those who did report attending did not feel heard in a meaningful sense or that their concerns were adequately addressed, an experience that was more discouraging than democratic.<sup>22</sup>

The final budget hearing was held downtown at the park district's offices at 11:30 a.m., a timing and location that may have discouraged participation from park stakeholders. It was also held only a week before the final vote, which was most likely too late for any feedback to lead to substantive changes. The public participation aspects of this process amount to little more than informing and placation of the public, not the citizen control that park stakeholders demand and deserve.

### CPD FY18 Budget Process Timeline

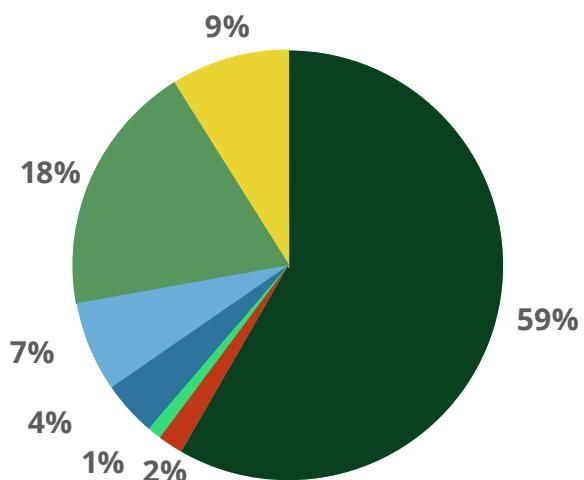


# REVENUE

The Chicago Park District's balanced budget has increased steadily from \$393.9 million in FY2007 to \$462.3 million in FY2018.<sup>23</sup> Property taxes account for \$274.1 million or 58.7% of total revenue. This levy represents 5.15% of a Chicago property owner's tax bill (\$205.83 annually for a house valued at \$224,500) and was increased by 3.9% for the FY2018 budget, only the second increase in the last thirteen years. Other stable revenue sources are the balances from the prior year fund balance and the Personal Property Replacement Tax (tax on the net income of corporations, partnerships, trusts, etc.)

The park district has avoided politically unpopular property tax increases by relying instead on user fees, permits, corporate sponsorships, and managed assets (previously referred to as privatized contracts). Fees across the board, from harbor and golf to parking and swim lessons, have continued to increase. Expected gross revenue from permits was up 40% since FY2013 to \$17.1 million, as the park district has more heavily marketed private event opportunities within the parks. In previous years, Corporate Sponsorships were a separate line item in the budget's revenue summary, accounting for \$2.1 million in 2017. This year they have been consolidated with Private Grants and Donations, making it much more difficult to determine how reliant the park district will be on these sponsorships, though the New Business Development department anticipates securing \$575,000 in new sponsorships for FY2018.

**Figure 10: 2018 CPD Operating Budget: Revenue**



Across the park district, privatized contracts continue to be looked to for increasing revenue. The aforementioned golf and harbor fees, leasing of parkland for new concessions stands and restaurants, and private management of Maggie Daley Park and other recreation sites represent over \$35.3 million in net revenue for the park district in 2018. Park activists continue to grow wary of the conflict between corporate interests and residents as customers of the park district and the potential imbalance between its pursuit of revenue generating assets and its recreational and environmental mission.

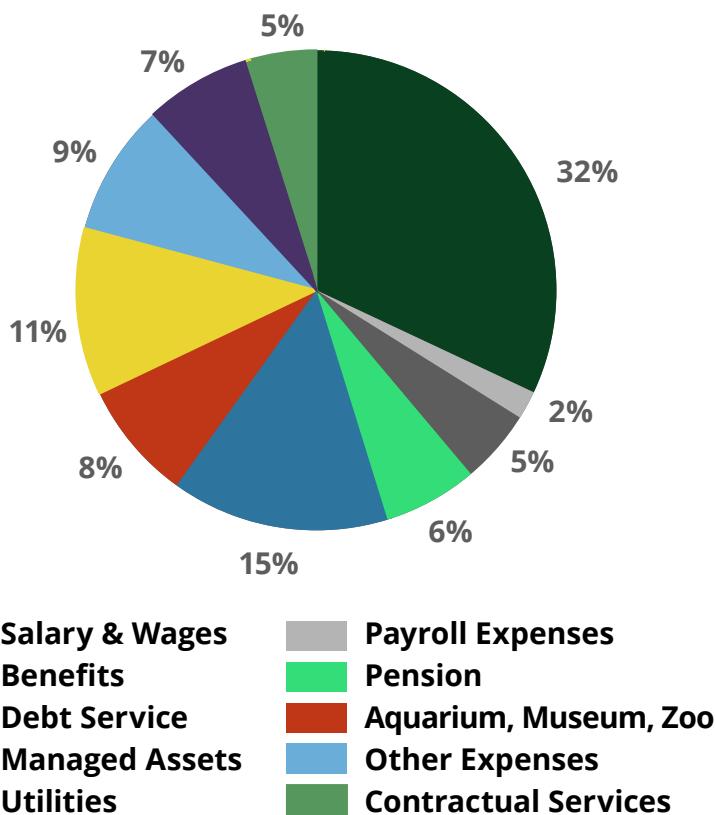


# EXPENDITURES

The largest single expenditure in the budget is salary and wages at \$150.7 million, a 12% increase over the past five years. Since 2008, the park district has decreased its FTE (fulltime equivalent) positions to 3208, 89% of which are union members. Approximately one in six dollars go toward debt service. In addition, pension contributions have increased by 32.6% since FY2017 to a total of \$27.6 million. As of December 31, 2016, the park district's unfunded pension liability had increased to \$611.9 million, while the funded ratio had fallen to a ten year low of 39.1%. While Public Act 98-0622, passed in 2014, was designed to raise the retirement age and reduce annual benefits, it was found unconstitutional by Judge Neil Cohen in March 2018.<sup>24</sup> Moving to an annually determined actuarial funding level and substantially increasing pension payments will be necessary for the long-term financial health of the district.<sup>25</sup>

The District's expenses can also be understood as follows:

**Figure 11: 2018 CPD Operating Budget: Expenses**



**Table 1: Chicago Park District Expenses by Department**

DEPARTMENT FUNCTIONS (NOT EXHAUSTIVELY LISTED)	EXPENSES (IN MILLIONS)
Community Recreation: North, South, Central regions, programs	\$113.9
Operations: Facilities	\$83.8
Management, Security, Natural Resources	
Administration: Communications, Revenue, Purchasing	\$46.2
Legal: General Counsel and Law Department	\$10.7
Technology: IT, Public Website	\$10.3
Finance: Budget & Management, Comptroller, Treasurer	\$7.8
Executive Office: Board of Commissioners, Superintendent, CEO, IG	\$2.3

*Source: Chicago Park District 2018 Budget Summary*

# INDIVIDUAL PARK BUDGETS

The park district also creates individualized budgets for certain parks within the district, outlining staffing positions, both hourly and salaried, as well as the materials, supplies, and services residents can expect to find. However parks with specific budgets make up only 37% of those in the North region, 32% of those in the Central region, and 43% of those in the South region (see map on the opposite page). None of the city's mini-parks, nature preserves, or passive parks have budgets, as well as only 33% of neighborhood parks (see class descriptions in previous section), and there are significant difference in how various classes of parks are funded across regions.

**For Chicago's mid-size park classes, South region parks have significantly lower budgets than comparable parks in the North and Central regions.<sup>26</sup>** There is also a significant difference in how lead staff are allocated and funded. Parks with individual budgets are commonly assigned either a Playground Supervisor or Super of Recreation.

**Table 2: Average Park Budget by Park Class & Region**

PARK CLASS	NORTH	CENTRAL	SOUTH
Regional	\$501,889	\$695,647	\$407,234
Community	\$352,553	\$362,272	\$266,650
Neighborhood	\$134,362	\$185,963	\$104,681

Source: [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/sites/default/files/documents/departments/budget/2018-budget-appropriations.pdf](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/sites/default/files/documents/departments/budget/2018-budget-appropriations.pdf)

**Table 3: Comparison of Park Leadership Salaries**

## PLAYGROUND SUPERVISOR PARK SUPER OF RECREATION

Average Salary	\$59,020	\$69,075
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### % of Lead Park Staff

North	36%	64%
Central	24%	76%
South	40%	60%

### Average Park Size (Acres)

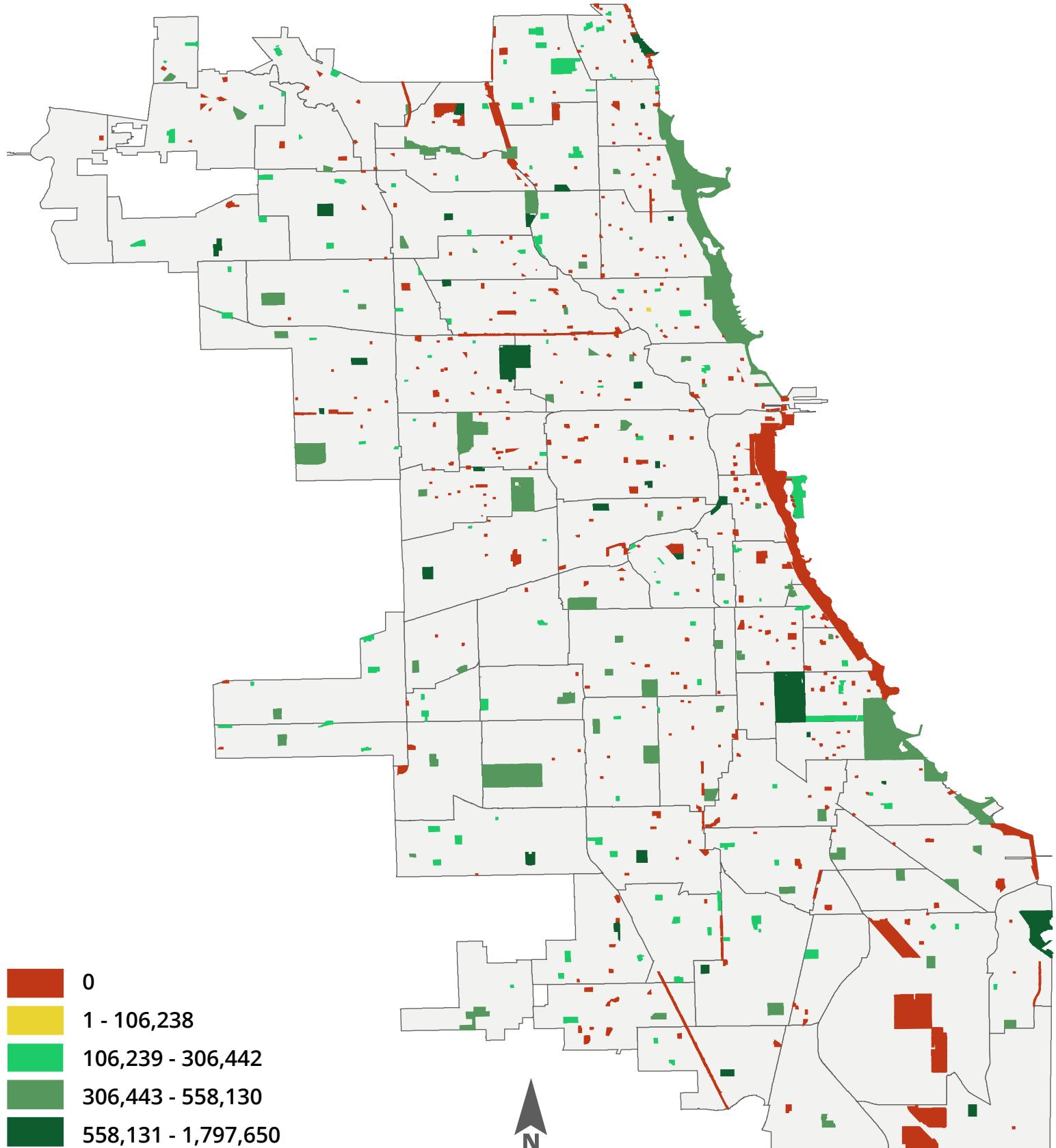
North	4.85	15.20
Central	3.43	25.17
South	8.15	50.22

Source: [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/sites/default/files/documents/departments/budget/2018-budget-appropriations.pdf](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/sites/default/files/documents/departments/budget/2018-budget-appropriations.pdf)

## BIG MARSH PARK

Despite accounting for nearly 300 acres of parkland, users of the far South Side's Big Marsh Park will not find an individual budget for the park within the Park District's annual Budget Appropriations document. Even looking online would not reveal that their park is supervised by Trumbull Park, creating unclear expectations around maintenance, programming, and staffing. It is one of almost 380 parks that lack a specific annual budget.

Figure 12: Individual Park Budgets Across the District



# CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

While briefly described in the CPD's Budget Summary, the district's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a separate budget with its own process. It budgets for any projects that would cost over \$10,000 dollars and have a life expectancy of over five years. Funding comes from \$30-40 million in annually-issued General Obligation (GO) bonds ands outside sources such as state grants and funds set aside from the 75-year lease of the city's public parking, for total revenue in the 2017-2021 five year plan of \$237.2 million. Of these, 38% will be directed toward acquisition and development (new acreage and construction); 30% toward site improvement (new fieldhouses, pools, athletic fields, etc.); 26% toward facility rehabilitation; and 6% toward technology, vehicles, and equipment.

Project requests are received either externally (park advisory councils, budget hearings, new laws, etc.) or internally (park inspections, facilities assessments, etc.). **The District's Code mandates that it "will hold a minimum of 10 community meetings to solicit public comment" on the development of the plan.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately the district's meeting calendar makes no mention of such forums.**

Next, they are supposed to be investigated by an Implementation Committee (comprised of the General Superintendent, CPD staff, three members of the public and a member nominated by the Board President) to determine their scope, estimated cost, and comparative research, and research concerning the source of the request, its context, and other issues. It is currently unclear what body is conducting this review. Earlier this year Friends of the Parks inquired about this committee's current members and how the public members could be nominated. Two weeks after raising this issue, the Park District Board of Commissioners voted to eliminate the Implementation Committee entirely.

After this analysis, requests are ranked as:<sup>28</sup>

- **URGENT, HIGH PRIORITY (EX. A BROKEN WATER)**
- **HIGH PRIORITY IF FUNDING BECOMES AVAILABLE**
- **WORTHWHILE IF FUNDS BECOME AVAILABLE**
- **DESIRABLE, BUT NOT ESSENTIAL (EX. A NEW FLOWER BED)**

The overall theme of the 2017-2021 plan is "Building on Burnham" and resources will be focused toward the lakefront, the Chicago River, natural areas, and new community recreational opportunities. While the plan does not list how many dollars are allocated to specific projects or which have been completed, we have been able to obtain records of capital improvement requests from the past two years.

## COMPARATIVE BUDGETING

While Chicago has the second largest total park budget in the country, behind only New York City, and the 11th highest operating spending per resident, it lags behind in terms of total spending per resident at \$173, behind other Midwestern cities like Cincinnati and Minneapolis. It is also tied with Madison, WI for 26th in capital spending per resident.<sup>29</sup>

**TABLE 4: TWENTY LARGEST PARK BUDGETS BY TOTAL SPENDING PER RESIDENT, 2017**

CITY	POPULATION	TOTAL SPENDING	OPERATING SPENDING/ RESIDENT	CAPITAL SPENDING/ RESIDENT	SPENDING/ RESIDENT
St. Louis	318,722	\$152,346,599	\$96	\$382	\$478
Irvine	241,102	\$63,821,241	\$215	\$50	\$265
Raleigh	444,271	\$114,444,690	\$114	\$144	\$258
Seattle	670,511	\$168,833,508	\$204	\$47	\$252
Long Beach	476,253	\$119,089,218	\$134	\$116	\$250
San Francisco	847,576	\$204,544,270	\$196	\$46	\$241
Arlington, Virginia	227,517	\$54,763,324	\$205	\$36	\$241
Minneapolis	408,326	\$98,011,172	\$190	\$50	\$240
Washington, D.C.	659,110	\$156,754,222	\$169	\$69	\$238
St. Paul	297,110	\$65,739,838	\$165	\$56	\$221
Cincinnati	304,833	\$63,615,728	\$142	\$67	\$209
Plano	280,326	\$53,349,348	\$104	\$86	\$190
Virginia Beach	453,947	\$85,656,248	\$141	\$48	\$189
Portland	620,564	\$109,500,536	\$158	\$19	\$176
Chicago	2,772,357	\$479,537,059	\$139	\$34	\$173
New York*	8,567,986	\$1,430,320,643	\$120	\$47	\$167
Boise	220,918	\$36,497,258	\$126	\$40	\$166
New Orleans*	388,540	\$60,747,440	\$108	\$49	\$156
Oakland	414,215	\$63,789,085	\$119	\$35	\$154
Milwaukee	592,535	\$88,161,012	\$98	\$51	\$149

\*Cities for which some spending is calculated based on past-year information.



## CAPITAL INVESTMENT IN THE CONSENT DECREE

The lack of transparency and questions of equity we see today are a far cry from the requirements of the federal consent decree that governed the Chicago Park District from 1983 to 1989.

The result of local and federal investigations into racial inequities in capital improvements, staffing, and programming, the Consent Decree set strict public standards around the construction and improvements of fieldhouses, playgrounds, and other recreation facilities, prioritizing them based on the disinvestment faced by the park and community.

The Consent Decree was lifted when the Park District created what they described as an objective and data-driven capital improvement process, but it unclear to what extent that process still exists or if it has erased the racial inequity that has plagued the CPD in the past.

# CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chicago Park District has a strong mandate to serve the recreation and conservation needs of Chicago, its residents, and its visitors, but it must make sure it funds that mandate through means that do not contradict it. The increasing privatization of parkland and services, in both temporary and permanent ways, threatens the park district's ability to adequately serve Chicago. In addition, a lack of transparency and meaningful community participation keeps the budget process from being a genuinely democratic experience.

## **1. CREATE A MORE PARTICIPATORY AND INCLUSIVE BUDGETING**

**PROCESS:** The Chicago Park District should actively engage park stakeholders across the city in the budgeting process, particularly with the Capital Improvement Projects. Efforts should be made to understand and address any barriers to participation historically disenfranchised populations. CPD must find ways to extend more budgetary control to the public and incorporate community participation into their annual budgets.

**2. ENSURE TRANSPARENCY:** The park district must improve access to information critical to park engagement and accountability. Parks without individual budgets in the annual appropriations document should have their supervising parks listed. Comprehensive annual capital budgets should be released to the public. Chicagoans deserve to know which projects will be funded in a given year and objectively how they were selected.

## **3. EXAMINE REVENUE SOURCES AGAINST MISSION CONCERNS:**

The park district must re-consider its increasing reliance on privatized contracts and events and whether a re-balancing of revenue sources could ensure equitable staffing and services while reducing corporate influence on park spaces. Park District officials should consider whether the burdens imposed by the revenue they are pursuing outweighs the benefit created through that revenue.



# CHAPTER 3: GOVERNANCE





*Source: Chicago Collections*

# INTRODUCTION

The Chicago Park District has a history of expansion and contraction in its governance. Created in 1934 from a variety of failing independent park districts, today's Park District is one of the few in the country created through state level legislation. While seven of the ten largest cities in Illinois have municipal park districts separate from their city governments, Chicago is the only one without an elected park board. It also maintains a governmental structure that struggles to be democratic, responsive, or policy-minded, particularly compared to other major cities. Opportunities to improve quality governance, accountability, and oversight have been proposed in the past and though they have been largely ignored, they may indicate a path toward a more effective model of governance.

## PRE-CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT GOVERNANCE

Chicago had parks well before it had any kind of governance or structure, with Dearborn Park (now the site of the Chicago Cultural Center) dating to 1834 and the oldest existing park, Washington Square Park, being created in 1841. However, park development stagnated from 1844 to 1864, when only five parks were added. This changed with the Parks Law of 1869, which created the Lincoln/ North, South, and West Park Commissions, independent municipal corporations which proceeded to pursue separate expansion strategies, complete with their own designers, funds, and even police forces.<sup>30</sup> As the city increased in both size and population, the number of park districts grew to 22 by 1934, with 114 commissioners governing 119 parks. However, this model proved unsustainable: duplicated services and a lack of statutory budget control were straining the districts, pushing many to the edge of bankruptcy.

## CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT: CREATION AND CONSOLIDATION

Having reached this crisis point and with an opportunity to pursue millions in WPA funding available through the New Deal, the IL General Assembly passed the Park Consolidation Act (now listed as the Chicago Park District Act<sup>31</sup>), which was approved through a citywide referendum on April 1, 1934. All of the separate districts and their holdings, were combined into a single entity. The various boards were replaced by a five-member Board of Commissioners (expanded to seven in 1988) who are appointed to five year terms by the mayor of Chicago and approved by the City Council. Commissioners must be legal voters, reside in the city of Chicago (a qualification fought for by Friends of the Parks), and avoid financial conflicts as described in the Public Officer Prohibited Activities Act. Commissioners must also post a \$50,000 bond at the time of their appointment, though the purpose of this is unclear. The board's officers include a President (who does not hold veto power), a Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The board appoints the Superintendent and Director of Human Resources and governs by majority vote.

## PARK DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY

The legislation governing the Park District illustrates the challenges posed to accountability and community participation. Any changes to the structure of the Park District governance would have to go through the Illinois General Assembly. Unlike the majority of large U.S. cities, the park district is not a department of the city government, but a separate governmental entity. While the park district is liable to lawsuits, the commissioners themselves are indemnified and protected from any claims or lawsuits related to civil rights, constitutional rights, death and bodily injury, or property damage in the parks. Apart from their approval of commissioners, aldermen have no official influence or oversight over the park district. While they can support and advocate for capital projects in their wards' parks, it must be stressed that our alderman have an astonishing lack of oversight or influence over nine percent of the city's total land area. While this is somewhat appropriate given the Park District's status as an independent government entity, it does mean the only democratically-elected individual to whom commissioners are accountable is the mayor.

If elected officials have a lack of influence over the board of commissioners, the average citizen has even less. The Board of Commissioners meets only once a month, reduced from twice a month in 1994) generally at 11:30 a.m. Most meetings are held at the CPD's office at 541 N. Fairbanks, though law requires that three meetings a year be held at fieldhouses across the city. In 2017, those locations were Park 571, Fernwood Park, and the Theater on the Lake. The timing, location and accessibility of these meetings again raises the question of whether the Park District is doing all it can to break down barriers to community participation in its governance.

When members of the public are able to attend, they may find their experience less than empowering. The only space for community participation is the "People in the Parks", a segment advocated for by Friends in the Parks in which individuals are given two minutes of time to speak. A resolution passed on May 9, 2018, with no consultation with park advocates and external stakeholders, further constricted this participation: among other rules, it prohibits hand-held posters; limits the public comment period to thirty minutes; and requires registration to speak several days before an upcoming board meeting.<sup>32</sup> When the business of the meeting is being conducted, including any contracting or policy decisions, the public must content themselves to listen. While there used to be committee meetings preceding the general board meeting which were also open to public participation, they have been eliminated since the early 1990's.

## COMPARABLE MODELS: NYC, LOS ANGELES, HOUSTON, MINNEAPOLIS

Various cities of size similar to Chicago employ park governance structures that reveal various strengths and weaknesses.

The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation is an agency within the city government with one lead commissioner and five deputy commissioners, all appointed by the mayor to five year terms. Their leadership includes a certified planner and several deputies who started as Urban Park Rangers in the city and came up through the district. Unfortunately, their board lacks a standard monthly meeting or any clear means of impactful citizen engagement and oversight.

The Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks is also a city agency, with five commissioners appointed by the mayor to five year terms. This body is mainly made up of planners and non-profit leaders within the city. As opposed to New York and Chicago, the Los Angeles Board of Commissioners meets twice a month on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month, with an option for the public to call in and listen as well.

The Houston Parks and Recreation Department, while a city agency, represents a centralization of power even more condensed than Chicago's. There is one director of the parks department, with no appointed or elected board or commission. It is also unclear whether the public has any consistent means of engaging with the department or holding it accountable.

A high watermark for public control of urban parks is represented by the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. Its nine member Board of Commissioners is elected by the public to four year terms, one from each of the city's six park districts and three at-large members. It includes a horticulturalist, non-profit leaders, and many longtime park activists. The meeting attendance and voting record for each is listed on the board's website, as well as a calendar of their nearly weekly committee and full board meetings.

As compared to most of these, Chicago's board comes from backgrounds wholly separate from its parks. Hailing from the worlds of real estate, legal practice, charter schools, and financial services, the board seems to have been selected more due to their connections to the city's political establishment than a proven commitment to quality and equitable parks. While the voting records of board members is publicly available, it can only be located by sifting through the minutes of various meetings.

## GOVERNANCE REFORM:

Various organizations have pushed for reform to the Chicago Park District's governance structure for decades. Over the years, Friends of the Parks has intermittently advocated for an elected parks board.<sup>33</sup> In 1995, FOTP and the Civic Federation of Chicago collaborated on a set of recommendations including restructuring the board's support budget, establishing quarterly town meetings, appointing commissioners with relevant backgrounds, and reorganizing the "People in the Parks" meeting segment to make it more impactful and deliberative.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, these recommendations have gone unheeded. The problems they sought to address have either persisted or grown worse, such as the board's support staff budget decreasing from \$280,000 in 1994 (\$469,000 in 2017 dollars) to \$119,524 in the 2018 budget,<sup>35</sup> leaving them without adequate resources for strategic planning or in-depth policy analysis.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The park governance has alternatively been created through ad hoc decisions, responses to crisis, and grassroots advocacy. While it has incrementally moved toward greater accessibility and openness, certain structural and legislative issues prevent the Park District, and particularly the Board of Commissioners from functioning as the democratic body the city deserves. These recommendations are designed to move the CPD closer to that goal.

**1. GREATER ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY:** Board of Commissioner meetings should be held during evening hours when park stakeholders could more easily attend. In so far as is possible, meetings should be held in locations that are close to public transit and within a half mile of an el station, with considerations made toward barriers to participation, such as translation and childcare. When policy decisions are being considered, the public should be allowed to participate in those deliberations by giving testimony on the issue.

**2. INCREASED SCRUTINY ON COMMISSIONER NOMINATIONS:**

The aldermen serving on the Committee on Special Events, Cultural Affairs and Recreation that approves mayoral nominations must provide a check on executive power by applying greater scrutiny to these political appointments. Aldermen should require that nominees have demonstrated relevant experience to the management and programming of parks, a commitment to the pursuit of racial and social equity, or involvement in a park advisory council.



# CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION





# INTRODUCTION

In looking back through 40 years of park activism, poor community participation on the part of the Chicago Park District has been consistent and arguably a poorly addressed concern. Stakeholders have often felt that they neither had access to the information, relationships, or power needed for meaningful influence over their local parks or the system as a whole.

This is not to say that the park district has not created spaces for participation. From park advisory councils to independent advocacy organizations to public forums, Chicago residents have had spaces for stating their concerns related to their parks since the 1980s. The problem is that none of these spaces have offered residents the power or control they have been seeking. Utilizing planner Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation<sup>36</sup> as a framework for analysis, we have found that the park district has adjusted the public's expectations; informed them to the extent they were comfortable; allowed the public to consult on their operations; and, at times, offered a measure of placation. Stakeholders, to their credit, have never been satisfied and continue to call for the sense of partnership and citizen control that they deserve.

## ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

<b>Degrees of Citizen Power</b>	8	Citizen Control
	7	Delegated Power
	6	Partnership
	5	Placation
<b>Degrees of Tokenism</b>	4	Consultation
	3	Informing
<b>Nonparticipation</b>	2	Therapy
	1	Manipulation

## 1970S: EARLY ACTIVISM

In 1974, Jory Graham's article *"A Slow Death for the Parks"* appeared in The Chicagoan.<sup>37</sup> Documenting the mismanagement and degradation plaguing Chicago's parks, it galvanized the city's activists to bring them back from the brink. Lois Weisberg and Vicky Ranney, with the Open Lands Project, Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council, the League of Women Voters, and Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, formed FOTP in 1975.<sup>38</sup> Early victories included a new law compelling CPD commissioners to live within the city and saving the South Shore Country Club from demolition in 1978, but it was not until 1980 that new federal funding would compel new forms of public input.

## 1980S: UPARR, THE CONSENT DECREE, AND PARK ADVISORY COUNCILS

In the 1980s, actions by the federal government facilitated levels of citizen participation previously unseen in Chicago. The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery (UPARR) program, passed in 1978, created new federal funds for rejuvenating parks across the country, but required the receiving agency to solicit input from the public. To this end, in 1980 CPD held forums in which residents were able to comment on the state of their parks and offer input on which projects should receive funding. Combined with meetings with community groups across the city, this outreach was both unprecedented and robust, though it is unclear how the public's input influenced what projects were selected, particularly since many sizable projects had been confirmed before the public process started.<sup>39</sup>

Seeing the need for organizations that could submit input on behalf of parks, Friends of the Parks began working with local communities to form the first park advisory councils or PACs.<sup>40</sup> From a grudging acceptance under Superintendent Ed Kelly (no relation to current superintendent Michael Kelly) in the 1980s to a foundation-supported movement in the 1990s under Superintendent Robert Penn, the number of PACs has swelled to nearly 200. Regardless of their shape, capacity, or relationship with the park district, Park Advisory Councils (PACs) share a number of common struggles.

As PACs were proliferating across Chicago, a coalition of organizations were researching citywide racial inequities in programming and maintenance. Their findings and subsequent legal action led to a federal lawsuit against the Chicago Park District in 1982. The suit was resolved in 1983 through a Consent Decree,<sup>41</sup> which allowed the district to escape any admission of guilt but also placed the parks under strong federal oversight for the next six years.

A local task force was created to support federal mandates concerning maintenance, capital

improvements, and programming. The decree continued and strengthened the call for citizen participation, requiring CPD to devise effective methods for soliciting input, particularly around the creation of recreational and instructional programming. When park programming failed to appeal to the community, the onus was placed on local park staff to discern what was blocking participation and correct it. The community would also be included as partners in any programs designed to confront external community problems related to public safety and violence.

The Consent Decree was dismissed in 1989 when the park district put forward an objective data-driven model for determining future capital improvements (a process that has since become completely opaque – see Chapter 2), but without establishing stable and impactful forms of citizen participation.

## 1990S: PROBLEMS PERSIST

With the dismissal of the Consent Decree and dramatic decrease in UPARR funding,<sup>42</sup> CPD no longer had economic incentives or legal mandates to take public input into consideration. Reports from the FOTP and Civic Federation in 1991, 1995,<sup>43</sup> and 1998<sup>44</sup> confirm that a centralized power structure and a consequent struggle with citizen input remained challenges throughout the decade. The Chicago Park District's Board of Commissioners held their monthly meetings at a downtown location in the middle of the afternoon, creating multiple obstacles for most park stakeholders. When they could make it to the meetings, activists found the structure of the meetings inhibited rather than expanded substantive dialogue, with little space afforded to discussing the policies that governed their parks. PAC members expressed a lack of a meaningful voice on everything from local programming to financial decisions. Rather than being viewed as equal partners, Many PACs felt that they were often treated with hostility by local staff, when they could find them on site. This "us vs. them" relationship led to a great deal of discouragement and frustration.

## 2000S TO THE PRESENT: UNILATERAL CONTROL

By 2008, PACs were active across the city but largely unregulated and unaccountable. CPD, under the leadership of Director of Legislative and Community Affairs Tim King created guidelines, bylaws, and registration forms that PACs had to use to remain in good standing with the CPD.<sup>45</sup> While several organizations were consulted with early on in the process, the guidelines released in May took an exceptionally hard line, requiring background checks, non-family references, and adherence to a detailed code of conduct that included an agreement not to grant media interviews. While some of the more controversial requirements have since been removed, the park district still requires compliance with these procedures and processes and has taken punitive measures against PACs who deviate from them, including the suspension of PAC presidents and compulsory re-scheduling of meetings.<sup>46</sup> For all of these challenges, PACs appear to gain very little from their “good standing” with the park district beyond “official recognition” and free use of park spaces. While the Chicago Park District benefits from their volunteerism and fundraising, claiming oversight of and credit for both, whenever PACs seek influence over programming and maintenance they are reminded that they are independent organizations, separate from the district.<sup>47</sup> The unilateral nature of this independence has proven deeply problematic for the PAC system and warrants corrective action.

In 2012, the Chicago Parks Foundation was founded to provide a new space for public-private partnerships. Much of its stated mission and programming appear modeled on the Friends of the Parks, although the presence of Chicago Park District staff and commissioners on their board may prevent the organization from operating independently from the Park District and holding it accountable when it strays from its mission.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The struggle to claim meaningful control over local parks and the district as a whole has persisted for almost fifty years. Activists have long argued for equity and justice and created the organizations necessary to build power and legitimacy, only to see those organizations co-opted into the district’s existing power structure. Moving from volunteerism to citizen power will require a re-structuring of the relationship between PACs and the Chicago Park District, as well as paths to claim greater influence than is currently offered to stakeholders.

### **1. EMPOWERING PACS:**

The Park District and Park Advisory Councils deserve a conversation and comprehensive process over the future of their relationships, discerning the right balance of independence and influence.

### **2. MOVING FROM PARTICIPATION TO POWER:**

In a broader sense, park stakeholders deserve more genuine power and influence, whether it’s with matters being debated by the board or private events in their parks.

### **3. UPHOLD AND REVISE THE CODE:**

Opportunities for public participation within the Code of the Chicago Park District should be strengthened and enforced.



# CHAPTER 5:

# SAFETY





# INTRODUCTION

Feelings of safety and security greatly shape how park spaces are experienced. While some park users are worried about people idling too long in the park, others are worried about the vulnerability of it being too empty; some are scared of gun violence and others are scared of oppressive police presence; some are worried about playground conditions and others are worried about vandalism -- all of these are important safety concerns.

And safety and security concerns are not unsubstantiated. From data available through the Chicago Data Portal, there were 2,079 crimes on park property in 2017.<sup>48</sup> While park district property represents over 9.4% of total city land, it accounted for less than one percent of all crimes in the city, less than restaurants, retail stores, or many other locations. Half of all parks had zero crimes attributed to them, while half of all crimes were attributed to just 15 of the district's parks. Nevertheless, the trauma these crimes leave on their parks and the victims is impossible to ignore. More than one in four crimes on park property were violent in nature, and nearly 900 thefts and robberies happened in Chicago's parks last year. Also, we received consistent comments and concerns throughout our Listening Tour sessions that reinforced that park users feel unsafe. Security concerns were raised at all 17 Listening Tour sessions FOTP hosted or co-hosted in 2016 and 2017.

Aside from listening to and collecting notes on the experiences of park users, we also asked some safety-oriented questions in our Community Survey. First respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with safety in their local parks. 6% (12 respondents) were very unsatisfied, 13% were unsatisfied (27 respondents), 29% were neutral (60 respondents), 38% were satisfied (79 respondents), and 14% were very satisfied (28 respondents). One in five respondents feel unsafe in their parks, a percentage which that is potentially underestimated as survey respondents were largely white and from middle- and upper-income communities.

The second safety-oriented question - "What are the primary roles of your group?" - was directed towards members of park advisory councils and other park groups and 56% (37 respondents) indicated that "Addressing safety concerns (e.g. addressing violence, hazards in the park, etc.)" is a primary role of their group. From what we have heard in Listening Tour sessions, the reported crimes in Chicago Data Portal, and responses to our Community Survey, it is not a far-fetched conclusion that many people feel unsafe and insecure in their parks. So, why do parks attract activities that make people feel unsafe and what should be done to change that?

# SPATIAL VOIDS

There are many reasons that parks are attractive to unwelcome activities and behaviors that fall outside the scope of this report, but one reason that we support parks as public amenities might reveal a cause of that attraction. Parks are public space, and, as has been discussed in previous chapters, public space is in limited supply.

It is important context that parks (specifically Chicago parks) originated, to some extent, because wealthy business owners wanted spaces where the working class masses would spend idle time, so that they would not be tempted to organize and form unions.<sup>49</sup> The positive irony of this investment in our parks is that they became sites of democracy, attracting public participation and activities. However misguided those business owners intentions were, they and our founding fathers of parks agreed that having time away from the dirt and chemicals of factory work was positive for Chicagoans. Parks continue to be important in this way today.

As of recent, “[o]pen green space is a public resource, fundamental to the urban reality that is increasingly under pressure from traffic, pollution, noise and the problems of a lack of space for social life.”<sup>50</sup> In recent years, there have been school closings,<sup>51</sup> homes have foreclosed and become vacant,<sup>52</sup> and recreational centers and libraries have not been adequately financed. Everyone needs the public resource of green space, including teenagers, homeless people, seniors, formerly incarcerated people, children, and adults. Everyone needs space to exist and thrive and accessing green spaces in urban environments is especially important. So, parks exist as public amenities because we have a common understanding that people need space.

But why, from that understanding, do parks seem to attract unwelcome activities? It may be that people perceive parks to be a spatial void, where, when they are excluded from other spaces of life (school, home, work, etc.), they can take and make space for themselves. For example, if one is structurally excluded from the mainstream economy for any number of reasons, it might seem that using the public amenity of one’s neighborhood park as a place to set up an alternative economy makes complete sense. There are other reasons that researchers cite for why parks are ideal for undesirable activities, such as ground cover from trees creates some privacy and some parks are accessible by cars but are not on heavily trafficked roads. These are also true and add support to the reality that people need space.

During our Listening Tour sessions, the most common activities that we heard made people feel unsafe in their parks were: “shootings,” “gangbanging,” and “selling drugs”; all activities that are associated with Chicago’s increased crime since the 1990s and alternative economies outside of the mainstream job market. Like all public space, there are disagreements about how it can and should be used. No one should feel unsafe in their park; parks should be sanctuaries of vital nature in our urban city. But, we should work towards common understandings of how park space is used with the important awareness that many people do not feel that they have space to exist and that parks, as a public amenity, might be their only access to space.

# PERCEPTION VS. REALITY: FEAR AND DANGER

- *"I have kind of given up on using parks for security reasons."*
- *"My sister takes her kids to the parks in Indiana; she thinks they are safer."*
- *"Lots of people feel unsafe, hear gunshots and see drugs sold."*
- *"I work with kids in school and many of them love to come out here and play softball, but due to gang lines and security reasons, some can't come out to play."*

It is important to note that criminal activity varies widely by park. Nearly half of all parks (46.7%) had no crimes reported in them in 2017, while 91.8% of those parks where crimes did occur experienced fewer than ten over the course of the year. An important distinction that many park advisory councils and other park partner groups are aware of is between the perceptions and realities of insecurity in parks. There are real concerns about the numbers of crimes that occur on park property creating risks to personal safety. As was previously stated, our Listening Tour participants cited gun violence and gang-affiliated activities as some of the reasons that their parks feel unsafe. There are also real concerns stemming from the extensive perpetuation of racism and other discrimination that cause park users to continue to feel excluded from using certain parks.<sup>53</sup>

Both of these realities shape how people experience their parks, but they can be affected by perception and fear. If all that someone ever hears about a park was a crime that was committed years ago, it might give that person the perception that it is unsafe even if there has not been a crime in that park for several years. That story might make one afraid to visit that park, and even if you haven't been to the park yourself, you might repeat this story to your friends and family. It is in ways similar to this that perceptions of fear, beyond what is reality, are built regarding insecurity and danger in parks. Perceptions that

are built from fear about insecurity and danger in parks are often entrenched, including by the Chicago Park District and the City, making them hard to reverse.

- *"[The park] creates a safe space for recreation."*
- *"This [added parkland] would benefit the community; I will not live in fear."*
- *"Having people outside reduces crime."*
- *"We need to get past the stigma of the park being bad – need to get people out of that thought process."*

There is a tension that several park users from our Listening Tour have mentioned: needing more programs to encourage more park users, needing more park users to justify the budget for programming, and, in general, needing more space to achieve both of those. While concerns around programming and participation fall outside the scope of this chapter, this tension represents diligent efforts by park advisory councils and other park partner groups to reverse perceptions of insecurity and danger regarding their parks. We have heard throughout our Listening Tour sessions a powerful way to rid parks of perceived danger and help park users move beyond fear: using the park for community-inclusive, fun activities (summer camp, movies, concerts, active playgrounds, etc.) and then talking about those activities to your friends and family. Reversing perceptions of danger in parks lets neighborhoods see the reality of insecurity in their park.

## AFTER VIOLENCE: PARK AMENITIES

*[There] used to [be] basketball courts, but someone got shot, maybe five or more years ago. They took out the courts. Now people go to [name omitted for anonymity] School to play ball."*

*"The washroom by the water area has been shut down since the 90s, because of a suspected crime. It was just opened for the past summer [2016], but closed again because of a shooting."*

In multiple Listening Tour sessions in different parts of Chicago, we heard similar statements that represent a specific loss of access to park amenities after violence occurred in their parks. If the response to select instances of violence in parks is to close, restrict, or remove certain amenities, this seems like the beginning of a very dangerous trend of the Chicago Park District punishing entire communities for the actions of a few to make itself less liable. This begs the question: if parks are not maintained as public amenities in neighborhoods where there is a higher than average perception of violence, then are parks equitably maintained? And, would the reaction of the Chicago Park District be the same for a park that is outside of a perceived area of violence in the City?

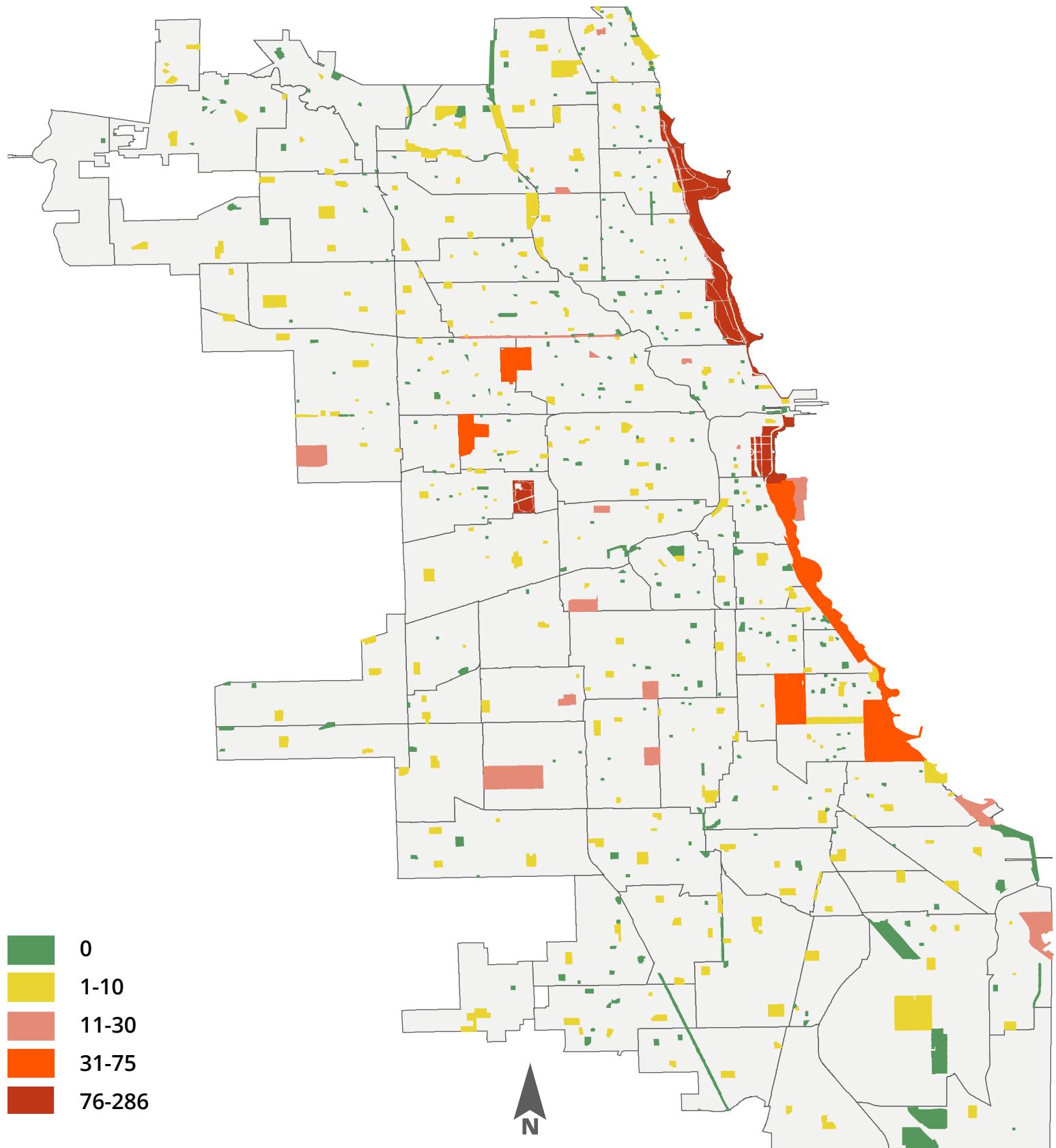
A Listening Tour session participant from the southeast side said it best: *"Everyone deserves access to resources."*

## POLICING:

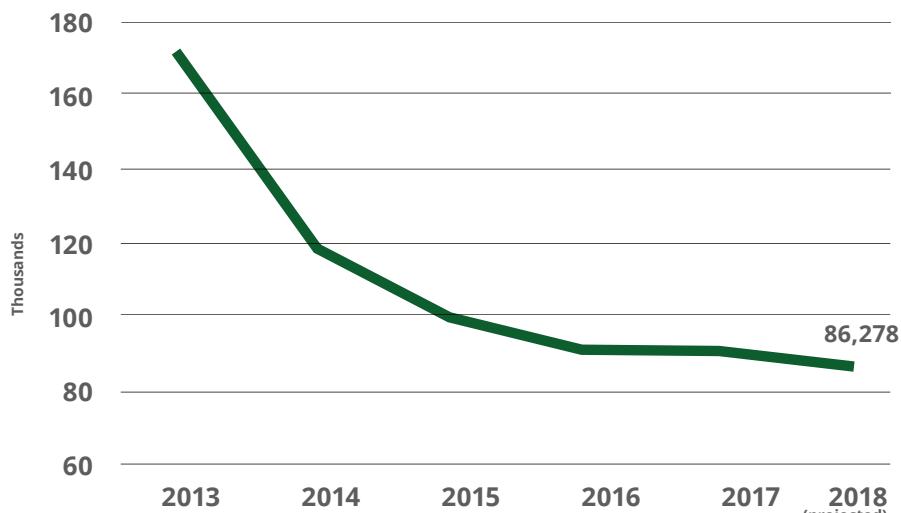
In March 2017, Mayor Rahm Emanuel introduced an ordinance to charge the park district *"up to \$12 million over three years to the Police Department for the increased patrols, which began last summer amid the city's surge in crime."*<sup>54</sup> For many, this was welcomed because there are many concerns about safety in parks and this seems like an appropriate response. Indeed, some park users who attended our Listening Tour sessions explained that they see a specific lack of police presence in and around their park and they would like to see police presence increased. While the majority of responsibilities taken on by these patrols are within the stated interests of park stakeholders, others such as to *"break up large crowds and unplanned gatherings at or near designated Chicago Park District locations"*<sup>55</sup> may yield problematic outcomes. This program ought to be monitored to ensure not only safe parks but fair treatment toward all Chicagoans.

An additional challenge for the Chicago Park District's security operations is that they are based on visibility and reporting, but not on intervention. In our review of the CPD's various security manuals and standards of operations we could find only one statement describing the role of intervention, under "Job Duties and Responsibilities for Security Officers" and "Stationary Park Officers": "to report any unusual activity however the slightest and be able to take action when necessary. To report and resolve all conflicts concerning the Chicago Park District." While there is great detail on how incidents should be reported and any many forms included, there are no details on how conflicts should be resolved or guidelines on what actions security officers should take. A FOIA request for

Figure 14: Total Crimes by Park, 2017



**Figure 15: Park Security Checks, 2013-2018**



Source: FOIA Request, Park Security Checks, records from 8/3/2012 to 8/13/2018

insufficient public data on security checks reveals that they have steadily declined in the past six years. This may inform why few arrests happen in parks, but there is still a real perception of criminal activity.<sup>56</sup>

*"We have beat facilitators. We have great relationships with police officer. We have the facts and data – we look at the data, see who is calling in, and we ask that those issues be addressed. It is not just with [name omitted for anonymity] Park. The perception is that the going on is happening at the parks, it is actually happening on the streets outside of the parks."*

## HOSTILE DESIGN:

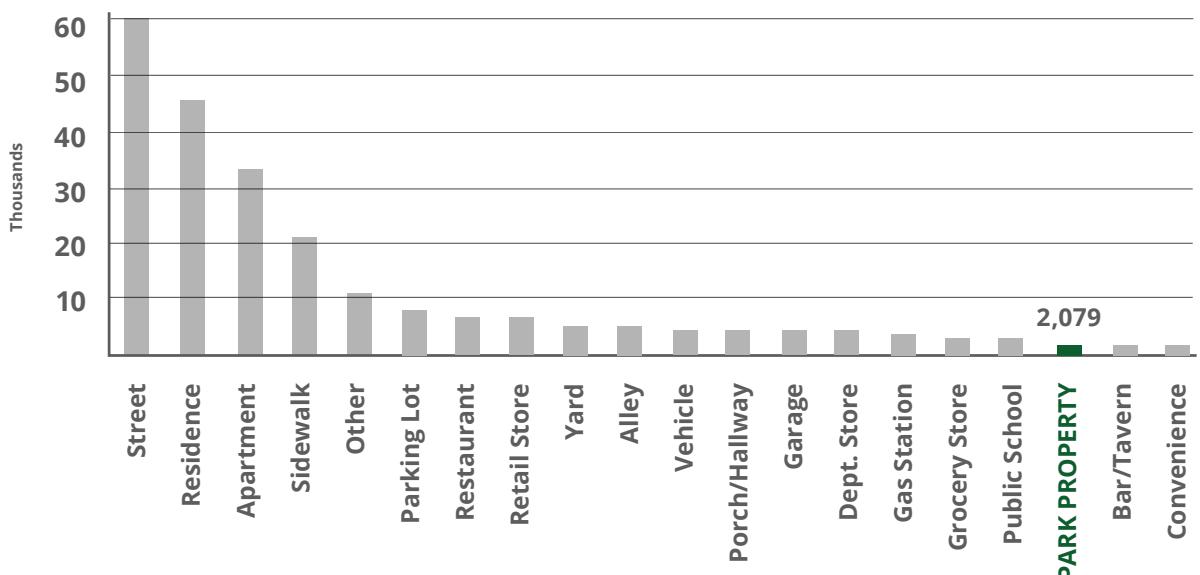
*"Fear of "undesirables" causes park after park to be remodeled without seating, shade, vendors, or other amenities that might encourage the positive public activity that discourages crime and disruption."<sup>57</sup>*

A primary problem for park user security is that these are the solutions that the Chicago Park District and the City of Chicago promote the most. For many it is no longer news that we exist in a carceral state, a country of mass incarceration. Why, then, are hostile design and heightened policing our two primary "solutions" for experiences of insecurity and lack of safety in parks? These are tools of displacement, ways to remove problems from what we see in parks, but not true solutions. Giving park users who participate in illegal activities tickets

or, worse, putting them in jail does not address why they are participating in illegal activities – it merely removes them from our shared space.

When youth (60 students ages 11 to 13) were asked about what FOTP could do to help advocate for their local parks they cited security

**Figure 13: Chicago Crimes by Location, 2001-2018**



Source: Chicago Data Portal: Crimes – 2001 to Present

concerns, but did not say increased police presence as their proposed solutions. They listed “cameras, crossing guards, and blue lights (a reference to security cameras set up by the city)”

*“Our park and recreation system is part of the glue that binds communities together. It is only through smart, well thought out planning and maintenance of parks that consumers can feel safe in utilizing these wonderful resources. The public’s need for gathering places is evident, now more than ever. The need to gather, to share stories, to celebrate, protest and grieve in a common place is a basic, human, and universal right. We must continue to allow and encourage the diversity, culture and commerce of all our communities to thrive in healthy, livable cities, markets, parks and neighborhoods.”*

## CONCLUSION AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

An unsafe park in an unsafe neighborhood, no matter how well-invested in, will be chronically underutilized. While many parks have remarkably safe track records, the crimes that occur in our parks leave a deep scar on the collective memory of the community. They can also go un- or under-reported due to insufficient efforts by park security. The solutions that can create healthy, stable, and safe parks need to holistically address the both the immediate and root causes of this issue.

**1. COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY SOLUTIONS:** Park stakeholders may be encouraged to pursue culturally-relevant community-based paths to park safety outside of increased policing. An interesting model is the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization’s Mi Parque Leadership program, in which youth work as seasonal paid interns and are trained in community stewardship, conflict de-escalation and resolution, and restorative justice practices. It has proven effective at reducing violence in the La Villita Park while promoting community ownership of the park.<sup>58</sup>

**2. UPDATED SECURITY GUIDELINES:** The current mandate and training park district security officers appears insufficient for the security issues facing parks. Simply being visible and reporting potentially criminal behavior is not ensuring the safety of all park users. CPD security must be trained to intervene, de-escalate, and resolve conflicts, in a manner informed by restorative justice practices and avoiding racial bias.

*“Us seniors would really love to go to parks to just chill out but we are afraid because of violence...there’s no sense of security, not that a guard need to be there but we need to feel secure. I will not go alone. Someone needs to step up and say ‘what can we do to make these parks better?’ and no one is considering the community in that.”*



# CHAPTER 6:

# PROGRAMMING





## GROUNDED IN OUR VALUES:

Friends of the Parks works toward an equitable park system for a healthy Chicago on behalf of all its residents. Every park, no matter its size, can provide a gathering space for neighbors, opportunities for recreation and personal development, and a rejuvenation of the body, mind, and spirit. Accomplishing these ends requires responsive and equitable programming and maintenance, the topics of our final two chapters. These values also trace back to the early history of the Chicago Park District, particularly the leadership of Superintendent J. Frank Foster. Under his leadership, the concept of the neighborhood park as we know it was invented, complete with a new type of building called a fieldhouse and the programs that Chicago's working class population needed to thrive. This ranged from organized play to more basic health needs, including showers and hot meals.<sup>59</sup>

## REVIVAL IN THE CONSENT DECREE:

By the early 1980s, the best of these values had fallen away. More than three years of research by both activists and the U.S. government revealed glaring inequities across the park district, on issues ranging from programming to capital investments to basic maintenance. The Consent Decree devised between the Park District and the United States in 1983 created a legal and binding framework for addressing these concerns. Parks were assigned staff based on the type of fieldhouse: Park Supervisors for the largest fieldhouses (Type A & B) and Playground Supervisors and Instructors in Charge for the smaller fieldhouses and parks. They were responsible for creating recreational and instructional programs that were responsive to local resident's needs, interests, and desires. To facilitate this work, Recreation Experts were assigned to assist supervisors in devising effective means for soliciting the views and recommendations of local community groups and interested neighbors. Programs that were found to be appropriate, practical, and feasible were then rolled out based on the public's interests.

**If enrollment in these programs did not meet expectation, the onus fell to the park supervisor to determine how it could be improved. He or she set about evaluating the causes of the low turnout and was in charge of pursuing corrective actions.**

Where possible causes were outside the control of the park district, they would engage cooperative efforts with both community residents and other city agencies. For example, if gang activity was found to be a deterrent to participation, the Chicago Police Department might be called upon to increase patrols during that time.

When the Consent Decree was dismissed six years later it was based on the Chicago Park District's enactment of a purportedly objective and equitable plan for future capital investments, but no language in the dismissal order addresses how the district will assure responsive and relevant programming in the future.

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE COMMUNITY:

In 2017, Friends of the Parks conducted a community survey and listening sessions across the city to understand park stakeholders' perception of the Park District. When asked about accessibility (the ability to take transportation to and afford programs relevant to themselves and their families) of park programs 62% said it was Important or Very Important to have access to youth programming, while 63% ascribed a similar importance to accessibility of adult programming. Unfortunately, only 33% reported being Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the accessibility of programming through the Park District, with only slightly more (38%) being Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the amount of programming. 57% stated that it should be a high priority of the Chicago Park District to create more programming.

This speaks to two critical issues for the Park District. Whether the quantity of programming is sufficient to the needs of Chicago residents, let alone our visitors, but also whether it is accessible. Can interested individuals and families easily apply for and afford the programs offered by the District? Are the programs taking place during times that are convenient and desirable for park patrons? Most of all, are the programs in parks relevant to the lives of Chicagoans and responsive to their concerns and recommendations?

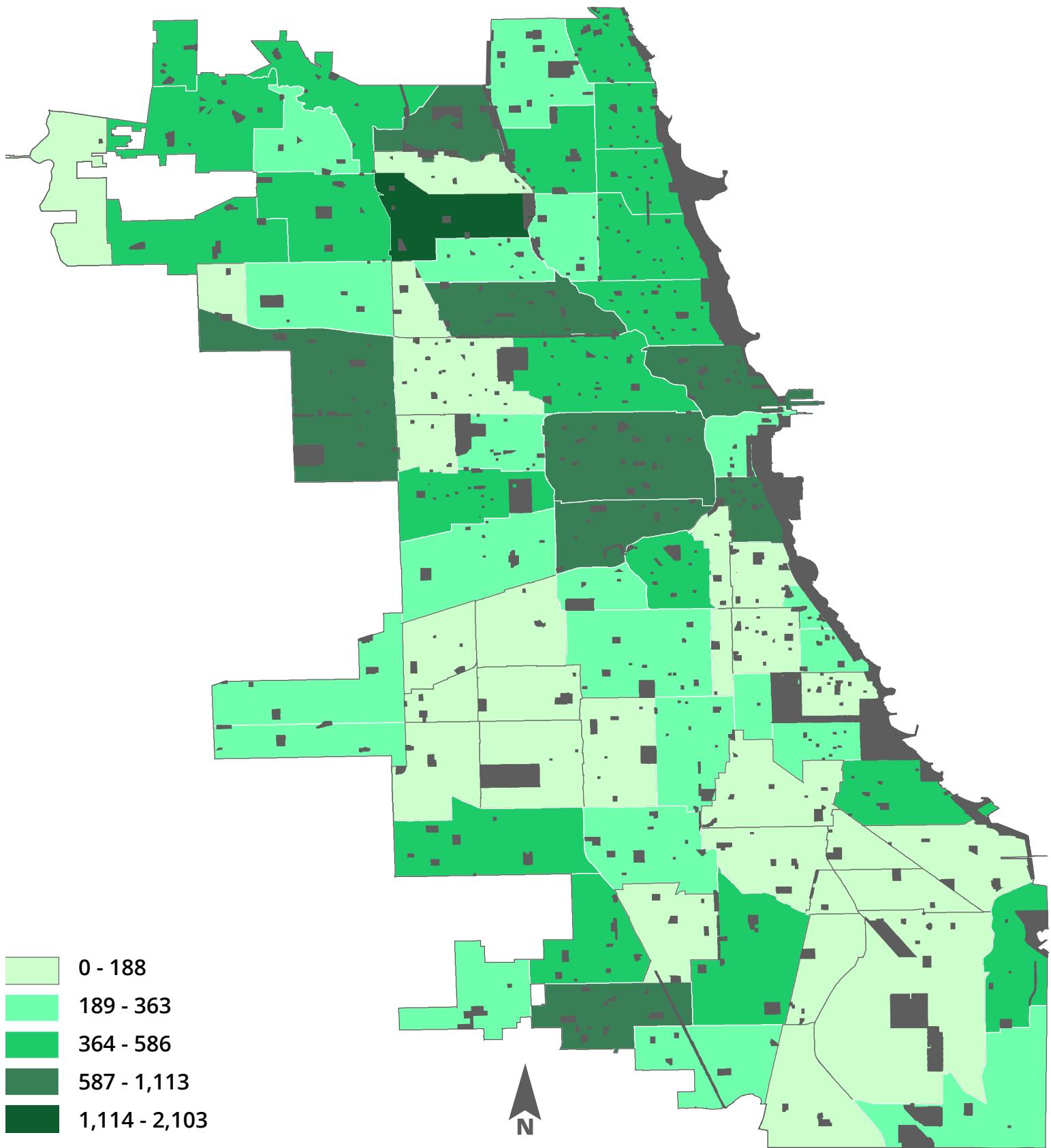
## A TALE OF TWO REGION AREAS

While the number of activities offered in each park can vary widely, we found the starker difference between Region Area N4 (serving the community areas of Albany Park, Avondale, Forest Glen, Irving Park, North Center, and North Park) and S2 (Auburn Gresham, Chatham, Englewood, Gage Park, New City, and West Englewood). **N4's 17 parks offer more than 2974 separate activities, while the 12 parks of S2 provide a relatively scant 757, only about a quarter as many. Even if the McFetridge Sports Center, with over 1,000 activities, is removed, the average N4 park offers almost twice as many activities as those in S2.<sup>60</sup>**

The contrast is even more stark when examining the types of activities and age groups served. While N4 has twice as many open enrollment and camp sessions, it provides almost five times as many instructional programs. Also, while the two region areas have comparable numbers of activities serving teens and seniors, the N4 region area has more than three times as many youth programs and forty-eight times as many early childhood programs.

The community areas and parks of the S2 region area bear some striking similarities to those in N4. Their populations are within 1% of each other. S2 has slightly more park acreage (393 vs. 371 acres) and overall buildings, as well as an equal number of class A fieldhouses, even if its fieldhouses are on average 15 years older than those in N4. The truest and starker differences are in the types of populations served by these parks. The community areas served by N4 are mostly white and Latinx, have an average poverty rate of 12.63%, and a life

**Figure 17: Total Park Activities Offered By Community Area**

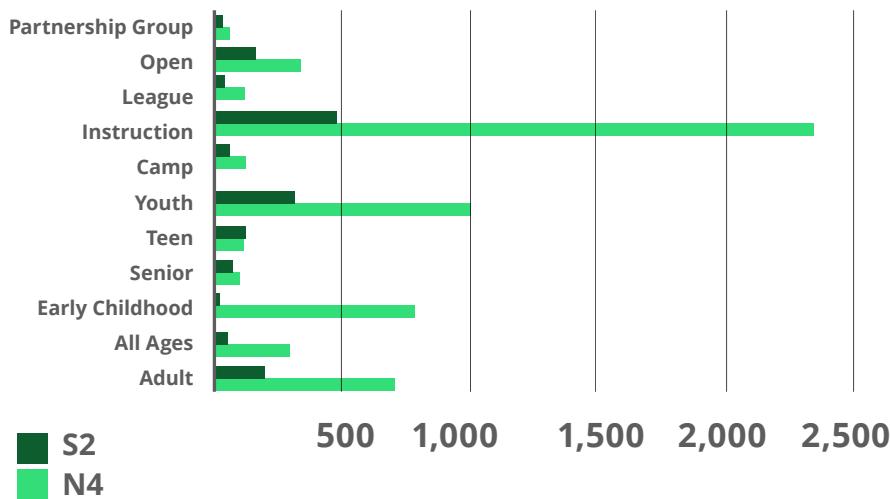


expectancy of approximately 81.5 years. The residents in S4 are predominantly black, poor, and experience a significantly shorter life expectancy at 73.5. Under-resourced and under-served south side communities would highly benefit from an influx of programs geared toward their physical, social, and economic health. Instead, we find the Park District replicating the patterns of social and racial inequity that led to the Consent Decree 35 years ago.

## AFFORDABILITY AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

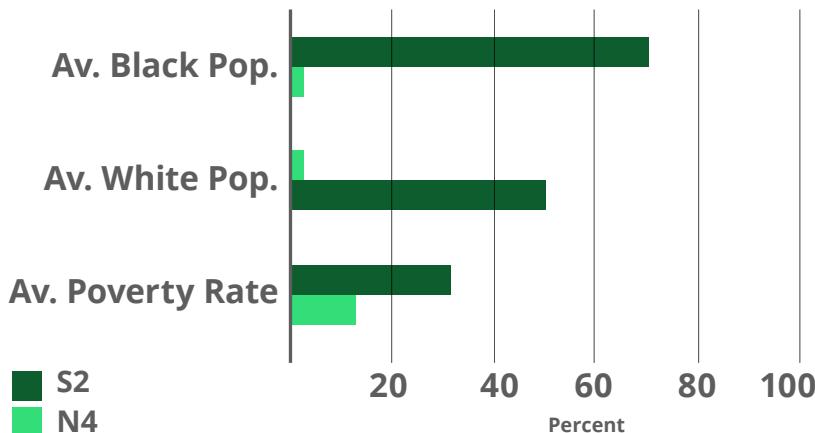
The lack of programming in underserved communities is only part of the challenge. Many potential customers find themselves unable to afford the programs that are available to them, and financial assistance can be difficult to access. For example, while the Park District budget claims to offer nearly \$3 million in annual financial assistance for day camp participants, all customers are required to pay the full price before applying for assistance. Records Friends of the Parks received indicate less than \$1.3 million in assistance being allocated in each of the last three years.<sup>61</sup> This suggests that the CPD must go further in their efforts to not only budget for financial assistance, but make that assistance more accessible.

**Figure 15: 2017 Programs by Type and Age Group**



Source: FOIA Request. 2017 Parks with Programs by Session 7.3.2018

**Figure 16: S2 vs N4 Comm. Area Demographics**



Source: Chicago Data Portal, Census Data – Selected socioeconomic indicators in Chicago, 2008-2012

# CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Chicago Park District offers an incredible breadth of activities for all ages and interests. Yet the distribution of programs is often inequitable and mismatched, failing to meet the needs of local communities effectively. Even preliminary research indicates dramatic inequities across the city. In addition, the programs families are looking to for their health and recreation may also be financially out of reach. The Park District must take action to fulfill their mission of responsive programming that puts children and families first.

**1. RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING:** The Park District should explore, in collaboration with local park stakeholders, what processes are needed to ensure the programming being offered is sufficient, relevant, and affordable.

**2. EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AND QUALITY:** Comprehensive research must be conducted to uncover whether systematic inequities exist concerning the availability and quality of park programming, particularly for segregated and high poverty communities.

**3. AFFORDABILITY FOR ALL FAMILIES:** Steps must be taken to ensure that all financial assistance is allocated to the families who need it, breaking down any barriers to accessing that assistance.



# CHAPTER 7: MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT





## GROUNDED IN OUR VALUES:

The maintenance of Chicago's parks is essential to the mission of Friends of the Parks. Recognizing a need for balance in natural and recreational resources, we note that both lose value to the public when they are not adequately maintained. A park cannot promote the civic, environmental, and physical health of the community if it is unprepared to receive its residents. Within this chapter we look at both the day-to-day maintenance of parks as well as the rehabilitation and development that happens through the Chicago Park District's Capital Improvement Plan.

## MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CONSENT DECREE:

The 1983 Consent Decree was a direct response to the inequitable distribution of resources related to maintenance and development, declaring that "no park, playground, or playlot shall be neglected in its building and equipment repair and maintenance needs. Recreation Area Supervisors were responsible for a monthly inspection of all acreage and ensuring that all work orders (requests related to minor repairs and maintenance) were executed. Non-emergency work orders had to be completed within 180 days of being submitted. In an effort to be comprehensive and exacting, the decree also dug into the minutiae of maintenance. Park staff were responsible for a daily policing of the grounds within 100 yards of all buildings and "play apparatus", paying close attention to the pickup of litter and trash and the removal of broken glass. It also spelled out the required schedule for a variety of maintenance tasks, from the mowing of lawns to the maintenance of jogging and cycling paths.

The Consent Decree was just as far-reaching in how it addressed capital improvements. A minimum of \$10 million (inflation adjusted: \$25.5 million) had to be spent on capital improvements, with a priority given to "parks of concern", those that had experienced neglect and inadequate staffing in previous years. Twenty-four categories of development and rehabilitation were identified (ex. Fieldhouse Rehabs, Fieldhouse Replacements, New Pool Construction, Sewer & Water Systems, etc.) with percentages of total funding being assigned to each category and a ranking of parks for prioritization. The goal throughout was predictability and transparency.

A new capital improvements plan, rooted in objective criteria and a commitment to non-discrimination, was the main cause for the Consent Decree to be dismissed in 1989. Whether or not these commitments to equity, transparency, and predictability have continued will be discussed through the rest of this chapter.

# CONCERNS IN OUR COMMUNITY SURVEY:

Respondents from across the city have very mixed opinions on the needs and quality of Chicago's parks. The most important needs identified were bathrooms (no small issue, even in some larger parks), nature preserve areas, and open fields, with many also voicing an interest in pools, playgrounds and indoor gyms. While many feel satisfied with the daily maintenance and quality of landscaping in parks, they do not feel the same about the physical condition of facilities and the timeliness of repairs due to general wear and tear. Notable is a lack of satisfaction in how repairs are managed after large events, with many reporting large swaths of their parks being unusable for months afterwards.

## ASSESSING DAILY MAINTENANCE

The Chicago Data Portal includes Park District datasets that could be used to evaluate the quality of maintenance. Weekly measures of open and completed work orders, as well as the maintenance of trees and shrubs, are both publicly available and accessible. While data available to the public only extends from July 2011 to July 2012, we were able to access the last six years of data through FOIA requests. We found that the rate of closed/completed work orders has improved significantly since 2013. The number of pruned trees and shrubs has stayed stable over the past six years, but we don't know how these numbers compare to both experienced needs at the time or if they have kept pace with the expansion of park acreage. Unfortunately, while the Park District continues to plant thousands of trees annually, this effort is consistently outstripped by the number of trees they remove, resulting in an annual net loss of hundreds of trees over the past several years.

**TABLE 5: RANKING OF PARK AMENITIES**

PARK AMENITY	IMPORTANT / VERY IMPORTANT
Bathrooms	90%
Nature Preserve Areas	87%
Open Grass Fields	82%
Pools	62%
Playgrounds	57%
Indoor Gyms	57%
Dog Friendly Areas	36%
Soccer / Sports Fields	32%
Basketball Courts	31%

*Source: Friends of the Parks' Community Survey*

**TABLE 6: SATISFACTION WITH PARKS' MAINTENANCE ISSUES**

MAINTENANCE ISSUES	SATISFIED / VERY SATISFIED
Daily Maintenance	64%
Quality of Landscaping	63%
Park Lighting	55%
Physical Condition of Facilities	36%
Timeliness of Repairs	35%
Timeliness of Repairs from Large Events	35%

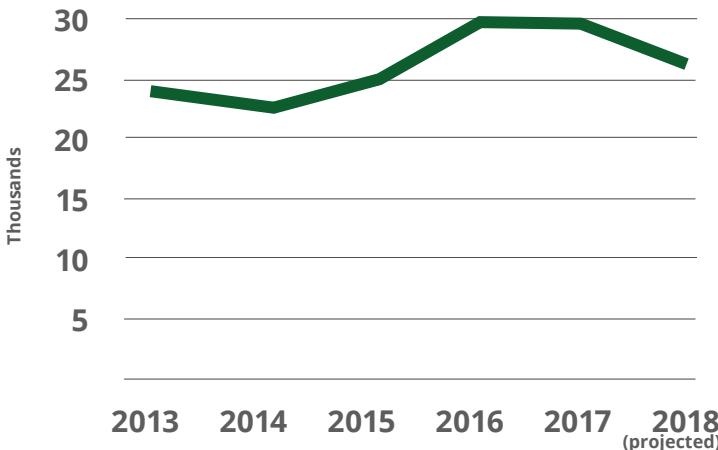
*Source: Friends of the Parks' Community Survey*

# TRANSPARENCY AND EQUITY IN THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

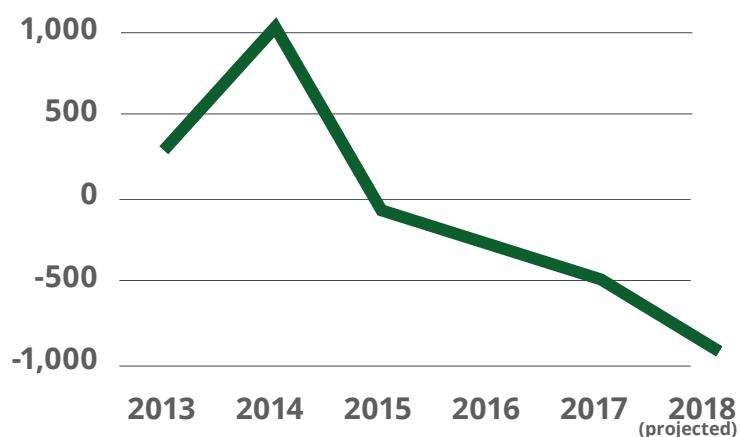
While the process for developing each CIP is described in Chapter II, this section examines in greater depth the district's commitment to transparency and equity. The Chapter XIII of the Chicago Park District Code states that the district will *"distribute its resources, services, and facilities in a fair and equitable manner"* and *"distribute funds...in a manner which does not discriminate on the basis of race and national origin..."*<sup>62</sup> It also states that prior to the presentation of the CIP, there will be a minimum of 10 community meetings where the public can comment and suggest capital needs for their parks. However, only one public forum is listed online for 2018 related to the CIP, held on August 15, 2018 at 11:30 a.m. at the district's downtown headquarters.<sup>63</sup> This may explain the relatively low number of requests submitted to the district: the 428 capital requests submitted in 2016 and 2017 represent only 196 parks, with 50 parks accounting for over 50% of the received requests.<sup>64</sup> The 106 approved projects represented 86 parks, with 33 accounting for half of those approved requests. **It bears repeating: just 33 of the district's nearly 600 parks accounted for 50% of the approved improvement requests.**

While capital improvement requests came from a variety of sources, there appears to be a difference in how requests are weighted. While more than one in three requests from elected officials are approved, only about one in five requests from the public are. Requests for paving projects and spray pools are among the most likely to get approved, while "Other Site Improvements" (a variety of mid-level projects), athletic fields, and HVAC improvements (air conditioning being a frequent request from the public in particular) are far less likely.

**Figure 18: Closed/Completed Work Orders, 2013-2018**



**Figure 19: Net Trees, 2013-2018**



Capital requests were then aggregated by community area and analyzed for race and class inequities. While black community areas have more than twice the parkland of white ones, their capital requests were only about a third as likely to be approved. **Community areas with a poverty rate below 10% were almost twice as likely to have their requests approved as those with rates above 20%. Capital requests in black communities are approved at half the rate of those in white communities.**<sup>65</sup> We also found that Latino communities have only about 197 acres of parkland, by far the least of any Chicago racial group, and their parks only had **eight capital requests approved**. While we are still looking to how funding has been allocated to these approved projects (data not yet publicly available), the disinvestment and inequity shown in this data runs counter to the Park District's stated intentions.

We were also able to examine, via a FOIA request, the capital improvement funding allocated by park over the past three years, with \$109.4 million dollars allocated, including \$76.8 million across 243 specific parks and \$32.6 million district-wide.<sup>66</sup>

Both the South and North regions received significantly less capital funding than the Central, with the South region receiving the least funding per acre by far. The district's 95+ acres of unimproved park land also received only \$556,700 in capital funding during this time, with \$500,000 going to just one seven-acre north side park,

demonstrating a troubling lack of commitment to turning recently acquired parkland into spaces for recreation.

Compared against racially-concentrated neighborhoods (community areas whose populations are 80%+ one race or ethnic group), additional trends emerge. Black communities have the highest capital investment, both total and per park acre. Disappointingly, the city's Latino communities, which already have the least park acreage, also are receiving the least capital investment in their parks.

## FIELDHOUSES

Park fieldhouses, a concept that originated in Chicago, can be the foundation to a high-functioning park. With 231 fieldhouses scattered across the city, that can house everything from fitness centers and restrooms to gymnasiums and swimming pools. However, fieldhouses are far from created equal. While some have over 40,000 sq. ft. of space and contain multiple gymnasiums (class A1) others can be less than a quarter of that size, with just one or two club rooms available to the public (class D1/2). These essential components of park infrastructure are also aging, with many in need of substantial rehabilitation or replacement. The average age of a fieldhouse is 66, with more than 10% built over 100 years ago. Only 16 non-boathouse fieldhouses have been built since 2000.

TABLE 7: FIELDHOUSES BY TYPE

FIELDHOUSE CLASS	# OF FIELDHOUSES	AV. YEAR BUILT	BUILT SINCE 2000
A1/A2	48	1948	7
A3/A4	57	1950	5
B1/B2	16	1959	1
B3	10	1954	1
C	25	1939	1
D1	17	1936	0
D2	41	1955	1
Boathouses	17	1988	8

Source: Chicago Data Portal, Parks – Chicago Park District Buildings as of Nov. 4, 2016

**TABLE 8: CAPITAL REQUESTS, SUBMITTED AND APPROVED**

REQUEST SUBMITTER	# OF REQUESTS SUBMITTED	# OF REQUESTS APPROVED	% OF SUBMITTED REQUESTS APPROVED
Internal Park District	258	64	24.8%
Public	130	28	21.5%
Elected Official	34	12	35.3%
Other	6	2	33.3%

Source: Chicago Park District. (2018, July 23). CRD Year View 2016-2017\_07062018\_FOIA2 [.xlsx]. Chicago: Chicago Park District.

**TABLE 9: CAPITAL REQUESTS BY COMMUNITY REQUESTS**

COMMUNITY AREA DEMOGRAPHICS	TOTAL PARK ACRES	TOTAL CAPITAL REQUESTS	REQUESTS APPROVED	% APPROVED	REQUESTS APPROVED/100 ACRES
>80% Black	2,331	145	26	17.9%	1.16
>50% Black	3,448	173	34	19.7%	0.99
>80% Latinx	197	49	11	22.5%	5.58
>50% Latinx	1,080	74	20	27%	1.85
>80% White	802	20	8	40%	1.00
>50% White	2,435	82	26	31.7%	1.07
>20% Poverty	4,356	245	45	18.4%	1.03
<10% Poverty	350	33	12	36.4%	3.43

Sources: Chicago Park District. (2018, July 23). CRD Year View 2016-2017\_07062018\_FOIA2 [.xlsx]. Chicago: Chicago Park District.; CMAP. (2015, August 27). Community Data Snapshots Raw Data, November 2018 Release. Retrieved July 30, 2018, from <https://datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/dataset/community-data-snapshots-raw-data>

**TABLE 10: CIP FUNDING BY REGION**

	SOUTH	CENTRAL	NORTH
Capital Improvement Funding	\$23,559,192	\$29,275,751	\$23,931,671
Capital Improvement Funding/Acre	\$6,146	\$11,663	\$9,669
% of Funding to top 10 parks	52%	62%	63%

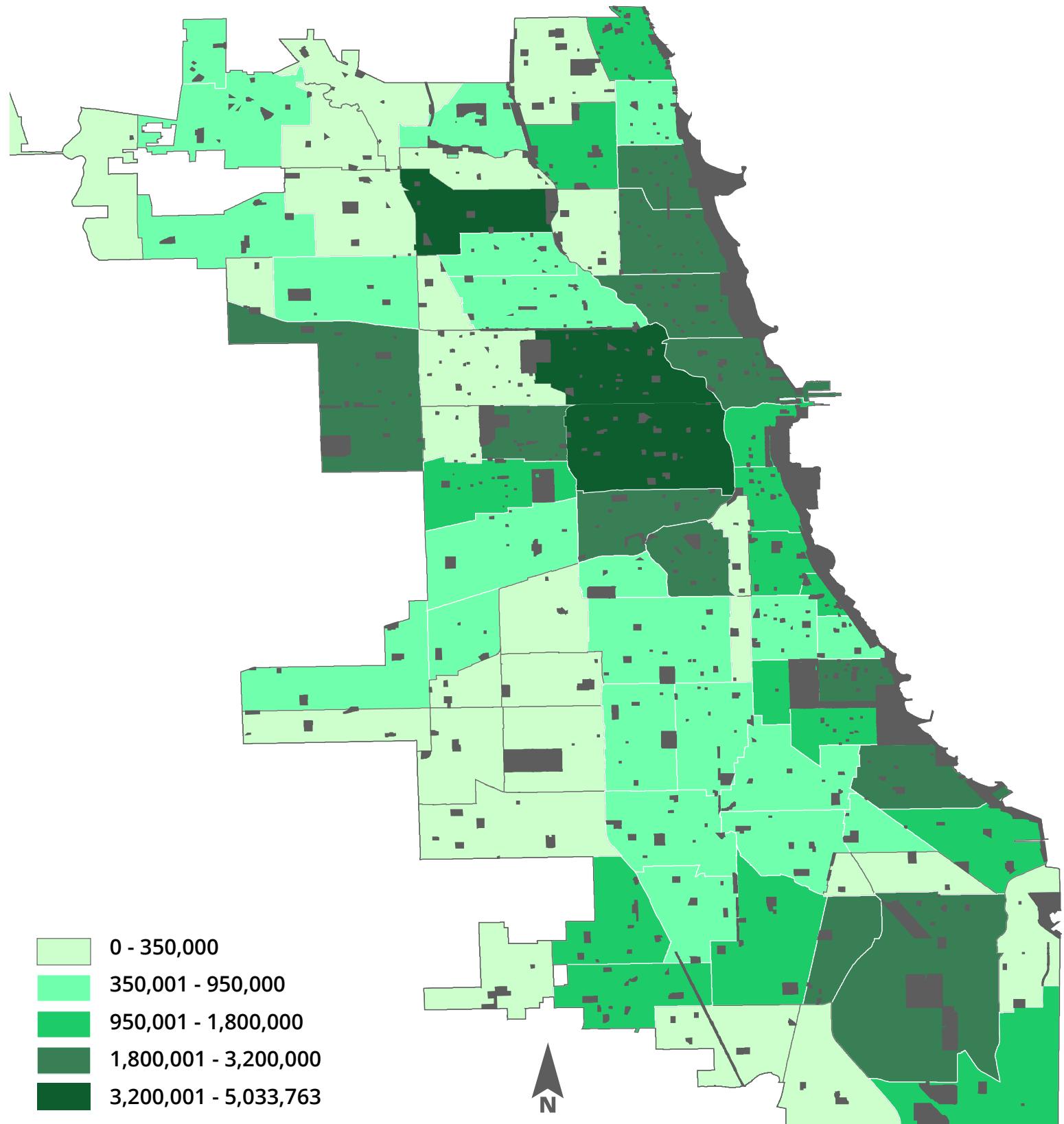
Source: Chicago Park District. (2018, July 23). 2016-2018 CIP by Park\_09.2018 [PDF]. Chicago: Chicago Park District.

**TABLE 11: CAPITAL FUNDING BY RACE/ETHNICITY**

COMMUNITY TYPE	80%+ BLACK	80%+ LATINO	80%+ WHITE
Comm. Area (CA) #	23	9	5
Total Capital Investment	\$22,731,211	\$4,526,837	\$5,955,217
Ave. Capital Investment Per CA	\$988,313	\$502,982	\$1,191,043
Ave. Capital Investment Per Acre	\$15,856	\$12,593	\$13,782

Sources: Chicago Park District. (2018, July 23). 2016-2018 CIP by Park\_09.2018 [PDF]. Chicago: Chicago Park District.; CMAP. (2015, August 27). Community Data Snapshots Raw Data, 11.18 Release. Retrieved July 30, 2018, from <https://datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/dataset/community-data-snapshots-raw-data>

**Figure 18: Capital Funding by Community Area**



# CONCLUSIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Chicago Park District may speak to a robust data-driven capital improvement plan, but it is no substitute for the transparency, democracy, equity, and specificity demanded by Chicagoans. The Consent Decree of 35 years ago set exacting and excellent standards of maintenance, standards that have slipped at many parks. Opportunities for public input and leadership over the capital improvement process have either been ignored or eliminated. The impact of this is seen in inequities around the approval of capital requests and allocation of capital funding across all parks. Addressing these issues is essential for all Chicagoans to have the quality of fields and facilities they deserve.

## **1. RESTORE PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AND OVERSIGHT OVER CAPITAL FUNDING:**

**FUNDING:** Renew the Implementation Committee or a similar form of community leadership over this process.

## **2. EQUITABLE FUNDING ACROSS COMMUNITIES AND PARKS BY RACE AND CLASS:**

**Conduct further research on the pervasiveness of inequitable funding and the causes behind those inequities.**

## **3. CLEAR AND ENFORCEABLE MAINTENANCE STANDARDS FOR ALL PARKS:**

**PARKS:** Park stakeholders and staff should have clear expectations for the daily, weekly, and monthly maintenance of all park grounds and facilities.

## **4. CALL FOR PARKS' INCLUSION IN THE NEXT ILLINOIS CAPITAL BUDGET:**

**BUDGET:** Parks and green space must be an essential infrastructure item in any forthcoming Illinois capital budget.



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